The ecology of . . .

The ecology of . . .

The PIERCER

by Chris Elliott and Richard Edwards

Being the text of an address given to the Wizards Guild of Kabring by the Wizard Pyrex, shortly before his unfortunate demise. . . .

"Brothers and sisters in the arcane arts:

"There can be few here tonight who at some time in the course of an expedition underground have not had to leap out of the way of a piercer launching itself from its roost high in the shadows above. If the piercer misses, it is usually smeared across the cavern floor. If it hits, it often does so with deadly accuracy. Because of these aspects of its existence, few people have any real idea of the creature's true nature or life cycle. For instance, in the Bestiary of Xygag, the sage has this to say about the piercer:

> *" 'Ye Piercer doth look like unto a stalactyte, and hangeth from the roofs of caves and caverns. Unto the height of a man, and thicker than a man's thigh do they grow, and in groups do they hang. If a creature doth pass beneath them, they will by its heat and noise perceive it, and fall upon it to kill and devour it, though in any other way they move but exceeding slow.'*

"Hardly pushing back the frontiers of scholarly analysis, I think you would agree. Unanswered therein are such questions as: How does it move? How does it feed? How, if it attacks only by sensing noise and heat, can it be so deadly accurate? And how, once it has impaled its prey, does it regain its lofty perch?

"Well, we now have the answers. After much careful and often dangerous research and observation, I have established the life cycle of this remarkable animal, which I shall now relate while a number of my assistants illustrate with conjured images.

"The piercer is a mollusk, hatched from an egg the size of a hen's, laid in clutches of six or eight in crevices on cavern walls or floors.

"When first hatched, it resembles a slug with a rather more pointed tail than usual, but soon its abrasive tongue is scouring from the walls not only the fungi on which the young feed, but grit and sand. Gradually the grit and sand are secreted into a rocky shell around its body, growing from a thin, sturdy point to a cone as thick around as a man's thigh, as it grows. When the piercer is about a foot long, it develops the distinctive adult oculars or eye stalks, which can be extended from the shell to point back along it.

"After slowly making its way to the roof of a cave, the adult piercer hangs there by its sucker foot, oculars alertly canted, waiting for its prey. Great patience is required, but when a creature passes immediately underneath it, down it plummets with fearful accuracy. Normally, its rocky shell will penetrate most hides, and it makes a kill.

"What *then?* I hear you ask. How do it feed on its prey, and how does it surmount the more immediate problem being stuck bolt upright in a skewer orc? Fair questions, indeed.

"What in fact happens is that the piercer must briefly leave its protective covering, and eat its prey while clear the shell. Now is when it is at its most vulnerable — save for when it mates Whenever possible it prefers to partially extrude itself from its victim, overbalance, and then pull its shell clear. This done, it can feast at leisure on the corpse, before crawling back to the roof to begin again the long wait.

"From time to time, two piercers will make their way to the cavern floor, where they perform a slow and intricate courtship, tracing labyrinthine trails in the dust. At the end of this ritual, they emerge briefly from their shells to consummate their union, and then laboriously return to their rocky roosts. In due course another clutch of eggs is laid, and a other generation of these remarkable gastropods emerges to continue the cycle.

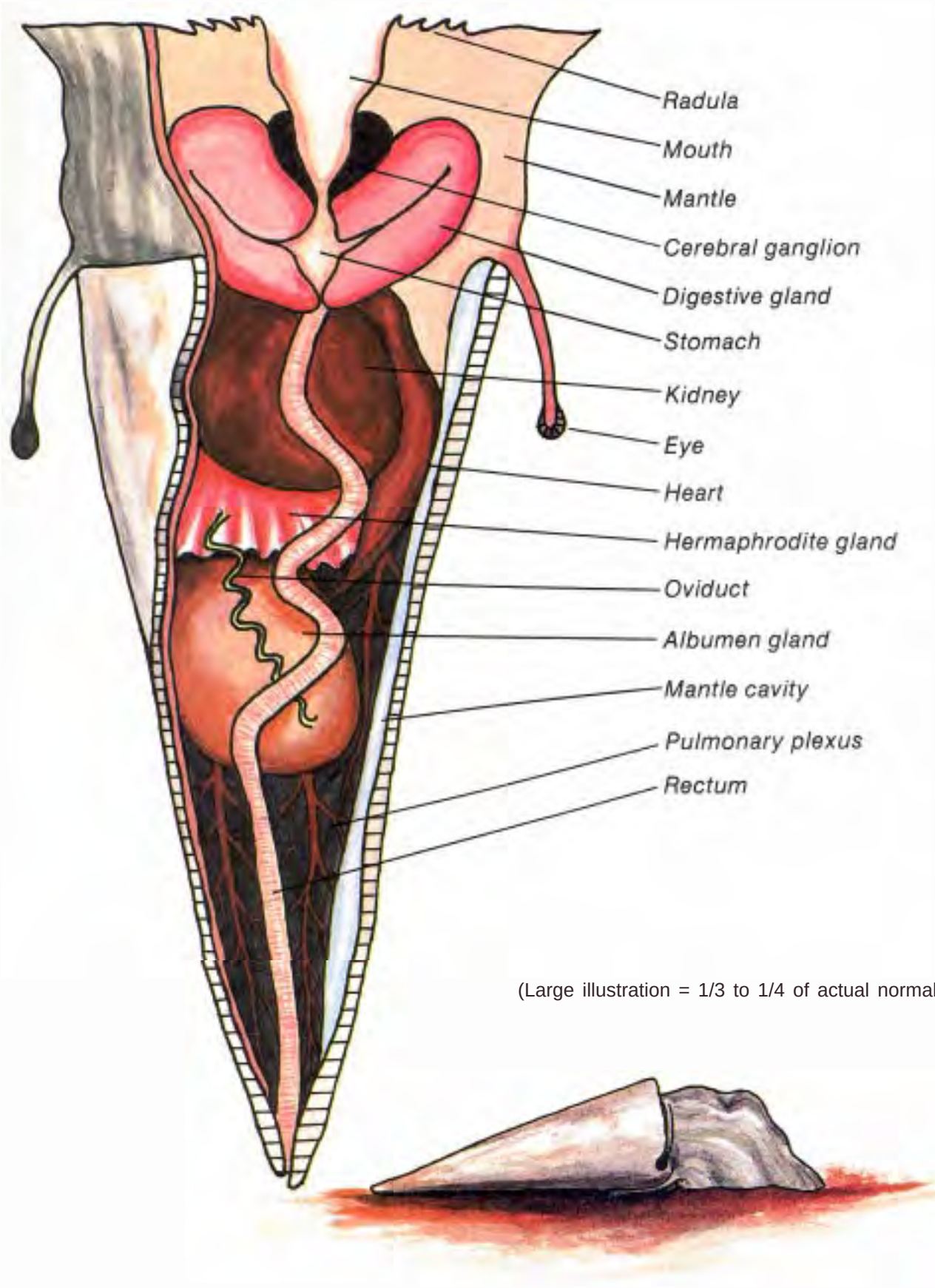
"Fellow thaumaturges, I give you *the piercer!"*

At this point a rabbit was released, and was prompt impaled by a small piercer previously unnoticed in the roof. Amid general uproar, the piercer was revealed to be an illusion, which was small consolation to the rabbit, but was generally agreed to be a stylish and highly professional finish to a fascinating address.

(This article previously appeared in Dragonlords — Yet Another Fantasy & Sci-Fi Roleplaying Magazine.)

The piercer

(Mollusca
Megastromus pilum)



(Large illustration = 1/3 to 1/4 of actual normal size)

The ecology of the

by Chris Elliott and Richard Edwards

The debate about the nature of the catoblepas did not keep the proverbial man in the street awake at night, but it had for generations added fuel (as if fuel were needed) to the intense rivalry between the Wizards' and Naturalists' Guilds of To-Zen. The problem was one of demarcation. The naturalists could not deny that there were creatures of magic, and magicians could not help but admit that nature could at times achieve feats worthy of any wizard — but each side naturally wanted to claim the most bizarre beast for its own. And when it came to bizarre, the catoblepas certainly qualified.

To the wizards, a beast with the body of a buffalo, a huge tail and neck, the head of a warthog, and a gaze that slew was clearly a magical beast, and they bitterly rejected the jibe of the naturalists that such a beast, magical or not, would strangle on its own contradictions. The beasts had been seen, said the wizards, which proved that they existed, but any observer rash enough to meet the gaze of a catoblepas died instantly — and what more proof did one need of the beast's magical origin?

Fair enough, said the naturalists, but they pointed out that the catoblepas had been sighted in groups. So, how did they avoid killing each other — or themselves, for that matter — with their death-ray gaze? And how, in the name of the Mnoren, did they breed?

A magical creature, the wizards patiently explained, wouldn't need to breed, would it?

All right, retorted the naturalists, then how come there are so many of them? Is some deranged thaumaturgist turning them out as an occupation?

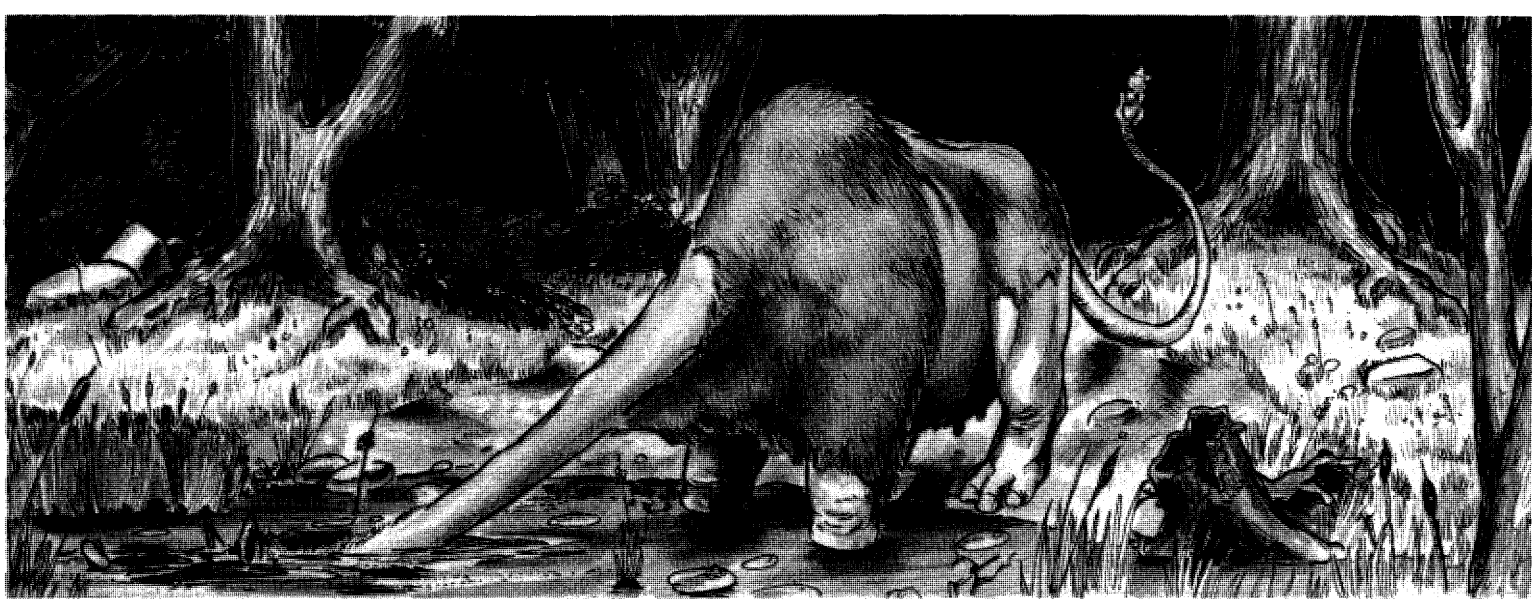
And so the debate continued, with each side having enough evidence to support its unshakable conviction that ***it*** was right, but neither having proof conclusive enough to convince the other side.

On one particular night, earth-shattering revelations were promised when the naturalist Bel-Ami, newly returned from an expedition to study the creature, was to address a capacity crowd in the Alchemists' Guild Hall, chosen as neutral territory. Inside the ancient vaulted hall, with its roof blackened by the fumes of countless demonstrations and its air pervaded by the sour reek of brimstone, the audience fell into three very different groups:

On one side of the hall were tight knots of black-robed apprentices surrounding splendidly gowned master sorcerers; hard-faced wizards, many in elaborately chased leather and silver armor; and a scattering of commercial-minded wizards and wizardly priests preserving a dignified silence. On the other side were the naturalists, dressed in all shades of brown and green, accompanied by almost as many tame hawks, hounds, birds and dragonets. And all around the upper gallery was crowded a mob of curious citizens, eagerly speculating on the outcome of the evening.

Suddenly, as if on a signal, silence fell over the hall. Bel-Ami, a stocky, bearded man in a curiously patterned green robe, came in from the side entrance leading an extraordinary creature. The height of a man, it shuffled nervously on its huge back legs and muscular tail, whilst its small forepaws twitched agitatedly and its delicate head swung this way and that, eyes, ears and nose straining in all directions.

"I expect you're all wondering what this little fellow is doing here," said the famous naturalist. "Well, after much patient and often dangerous observation in some of the wildest country in To-Zen, I can reveal that, far from being just another grazing animal, as we had formerly thought, this is a ***male catoblepas!"*** This remark immediately prompted a general uproar in the hall.



Catoblepas

(or, looks can be very deceiving)

"No, please — please relax! — no, he's perfectly safe, but he does hold the key to the mystery. You must all have read the classic description of, as we call it, the 'cat' in the Bestiary of Xygag, although how he worked out that its eyes are 'bloodshot' escapes me, and for a beast 'horrible beyonde alle description' he goes into a fair amount of detail!

"Well, as far as he goes, he's right, but he didn't realize that they were only the female of the species. From my studies, I have established that the female is a large omnivore, feeding mostly on ooze and water plants dredged from the swamps it lives in, but gaining an important part of its diet from animals it has killed. And no, she doesn't kill them with her deadly gaze, but with her *breath!*

"The female catoblepas secretes a gas, deadly to anything except the female catoblepas, that is belched out in an invisible cloud. The effective range is only about sixty feet before it disperses, but within that range, the only chance of escape is to run faster than the cloud expands. The gas is equally deadly if breathed in or absorbed through the skin.

"It was obvious from the time that I started to form this hypothesis that the 'cat' was immune to its own poison, but it was not for a long time afterward that I connected the female catoblepas with the small herds of grazers that were always found in the same area, following at a discreet distance, and realized that they were two forms of the same species!

"The male, poor fellow, is not immune to the poison cloud, and normally keeps well clear of the female. But in the mating season, the female exudes a scent which drives the male wild with a lust that frequently overpowers his instinct for self-preservation. He must try to wait until a solitary female is feeding with her head buried in the ooze of the swamp. Then, sprinting up to her, he dodges the heavy tail normally used as a defense, mates very quickly, and sprints off again.

"Six months later, the small, deer-like young are born. Since they are exposed to mild doses of the toxin before birth, they are immune to it. They are all weaned together, but at the end of the first year something very strange happens. The young scatter, and differentiate into sexes — a minority of females which remain immune to the toxin that they have begun to secrete, becoming fatter and thicker and eating flesh as well as plants; and the males, which undergo a radical change in their body chemistry, losing their immunity to the toxin and becoming fast-moving herbivores.

"As yet I can only speculate on the reasons for this division of the species; it may ensure a fitter breeding stock, or allow better use of existing food resources than the more conventional way, or both, or neither. Anyhow, enough talk. I'm open to questions from the floor."

During the course of his speech, all the magicians in the audience had been growing more and more restless. Now, one of their number burst from the audience with a horrified cry.

"You can't be serious! This must be your warped naturalist's idea of a joke!"

"Never more serious, I assure you," responded Bel-Ami.

"But, this is awful! When we heard that you had an astounding revelation in store for tonight, we were going to upstage you. My apprentices have gone out on an expedition to kill a catoblepas and bring it back as proof of its magical nature."

"That's quite possible. They can be killed."

"I know that, and you know that — but how far are they going to get with a polished shield?!"

(An earlier version of this article appeared in ***Dragonlords — Yet Another Fantasy & Sci-Fi Roleplaying Magazine.)***

The ecology of the mimic

by Ed Greenwood

From the *Journals* of Maerlun the Scholar:

The mimic is a curious (and dangerous) creature to most minds — but few know, or care to know, that there are actually several related species of mimic, divided into two groups: a larger, "killer" variety that is of lesser intelligence, attacking all nearby prey, and does not speak; and the more intelligent, eloquent species which will often bargain for food, has a curious (as yet unfathomed by me) language of its own, and often speaks orcish, the common tongue, dwarvish, or other tongues used in the vicinity of the individual creature's hunting ground.

The mimic gains its name from its ability to alter not only its body shape but the color and texture of the outer surface as well. The color and texture changes are accomplished by the shifting of pigmented liquid between interior and exterior body cells, so that the creature resembles wood or stone in color and texture depending on whether this pigmented liquid is brought to the outer surface of the creature's body or stored internally.

A mimic is naturally gray in hue, with a smooth, very hard outer skin that gives it the stone-like appearance. The pigmented liquid, brownish in color (often revealed to adventurers when a mimic is wounded in battle), is held within the body in large, muscular organs that serve as both bags and pumps. When these organs are squeezed by the contraction of the cavity wall muscles, they squirt their contents rapidly (within 1 round) into the outer skin layer, filling many capillaries that lie just beneath the skin surface. These capillaries then stand out, brownish and wrinkled, in a pattern resembling wood grain.

Reversing the process, from the woodgrain appearance to the natural state, requires a sort of external contortion; a mimic appears to wriggle and twist all over as it empties its capillaries of the liquid. (The creature can, as we all know, alter the external configuration of its form at will, within the limits imposed by the actual volume of its form.) The mimic grows replacement layers of skin beneath the outer one, which is constantly being worn away by the ravages of movement, battle, and feeding.

The mimic is amorphous, and moves in the same way it attacks: by extending strong pseudopods, which exude a sticky "glue," and pulling themselves along. A mimic can "unstick" its own glue at any time, and it never sticks to itself.

Reputedly, this glue is sticky enough that only the strongest of adventurers has a good chance of breaking the mimic's hold without killing the creature first. Some adventurers claim to have pulled themselves free from a mimic's glue, but such tales are rare and often their veracity is doubtful: (To simulate the possibility of breaking free in game terms, held characters may be allowed to attempt an "open doors" roll based on their strength. Repeated attempts to break free may be made, but no other action — attack or defense — is possible by the victim during the round of attempted escape.)

Mimics are interested only in personal safety and an endless quest for food. "Killer" mimics will attack any living creature, regardless of the number of adversaries or their powers. The more intelligent variety often prefers to bargain with an enemy initially — but the creatures have no moral standards as we know them: If an enemy is sufficiently weakened after a bargain has been struck, a mimic will "change its mind," always seeking a meal first and foremost.

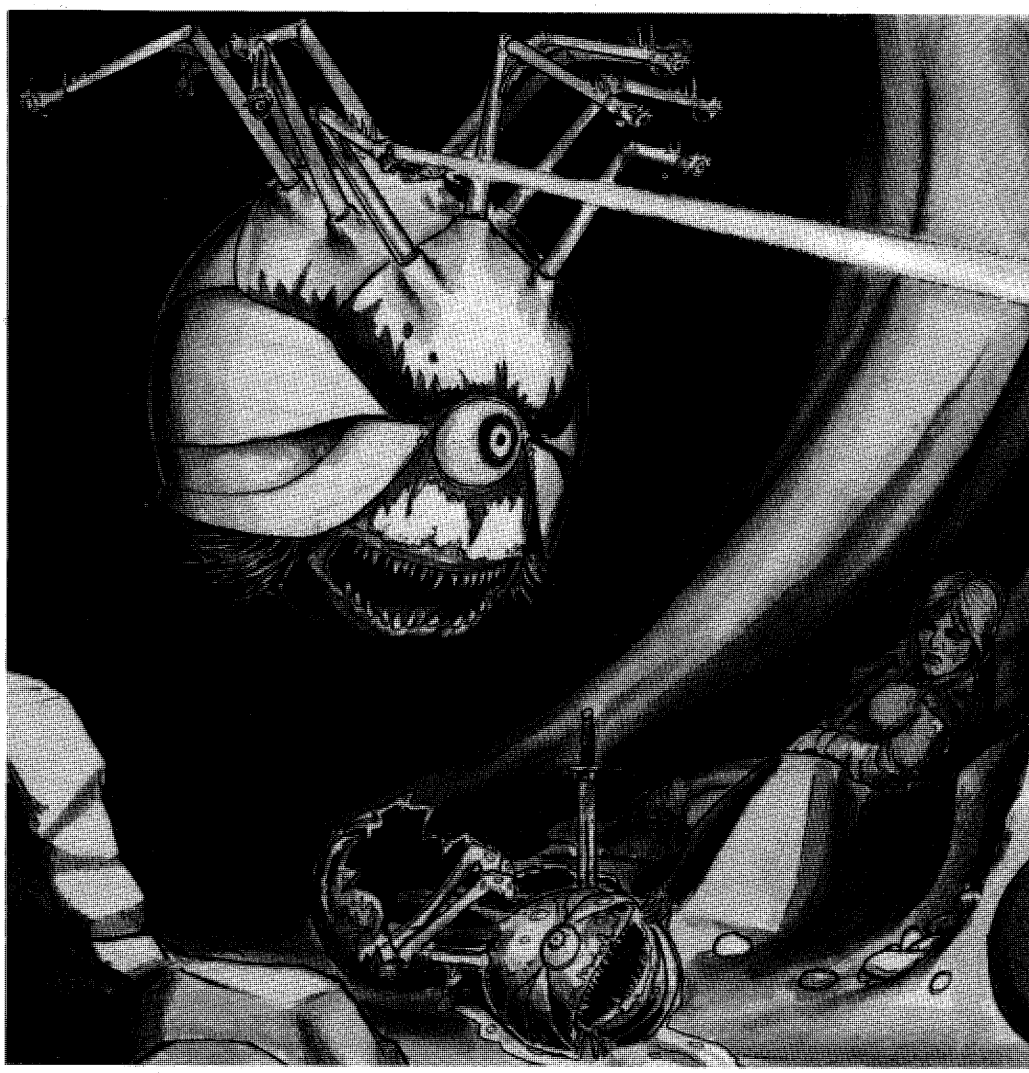
Mimics have very sensitive "eyespots" (patches of pigment that are sensitive to heat; light, and vibration) all over their skin. Bright sunlight overwhelms these sensory spots, effectively blinding the mimic; thus, the creatures are almost always found below ground or in other areas where the sun never reaches. Mimics of all sorts are immune to the deleterious effects of alcohol (but will absorb it if offered, to make use of the inherent nutrients and sugar), and are also unaffected by slime (including green slime), molds (including the brown and yellow varieties), and the corrosive secretions of creatures such as the black pudding, gray ooze, ochre jelly, stunjelly, and gelatinous cube.

It should be remembered that mimics can travel on walls and ceilings as easily as they can on floors. Those of the more intelligent sort are most adept at "hiding" by assuming the shape of a partition wall, overhanging arch, or rough rock wall if they feel threatened. One famous, if somewhat extreme, example: A mimic somehow came into one of the busiest market squares of Waterdeep and assumed the shape of a statue. It remained undetected for two winters, until the chronic disappearance of street derelicts in the square on every dark night prompted an investigation. A sewer beside this strangely unfamiliar (to the sculptor who had "done" the square) statue was discovered to be filled to a depth of more than 60 feet with human and animal bones. (Even after this fact was discovered, the "statue" ate two members of the City Watch who prodded it carelessly with their spears, not expecting to find anything.)

Although the details of the concoction are not known by this scribe, it is generally said that the skin of the mimic is useful in the making of a *polymorph (self)* potion. Also, further investigation is needed to determine the range of travel of an individual mimic over a lifetime, and the precise efficacy of the creature's detection organs, which, based on casual observation, appear to "see" up to 90 feet in subterranean (not total) darkness, and up to 30 feet in the gloom of night, or in darkened areas above ground.

The ecology of the Beholder

by Ed Greenwood and Roger E. Moore



"Many tales are told," began the sage, "of the dreaded eye tyrants." At the mention of this name, the restless students sitting around him in the outdoor amphitheater grew quiet. The sage smiled and continued. "You've listened to stories of these fantastic creatures, seemingly born to the art of destruction; wild tales of battle done with them, of the sorcerous powers of their many eyes, of their rich hoards of treasure. But few have cared to learn much of the habits and nature of these creatures. Know you now that I have studied the beholder for many seasons, and can tell you in truth what was not known before."

The sage paused and looked out at his youthful audience. "Some of you may be thinking about the good it would do to destroy the race of eye tyrants. Some of you may be thinking about the fame it would bring you to slay one, or the wealth it would have hidden away. . . . Well, no harm in dreaming." The sage's gaze fell upon a young boy who looked up at him with unusual intensity; the sage stared back at him, but the boy did not look away.

"Perhaps," he went on, "some of you may actually do battle with one of these monsters, for whatever reason. What I have to tell you may well save you and your companions as well."

The sage looked away from the boy and turned to a blank slate behind him. Producing a piece of chalk, he began sketching a diagram of the beholder with rapid but careful strokes.

"The beholder is shaped like a great sphere, almost the height of a man. The body is covered by several hard plates of chitin which overlap one another slightly, protecting the internal organs. A magical organ called the *levator magnus,* located in the center of the body surrounded by the creature's brain, produces an influence that causes the beholder to float in the air. This allows it to move about slowly, up and down, left or right, forward or back at a slow speed, like that of a pacing man. No magical spell or device can negate this levitation, though beholders cannot resist the push of great winds; most of them lair underground where they may go as they will, while others move about in desolate, windless areas where few other creatures will go.

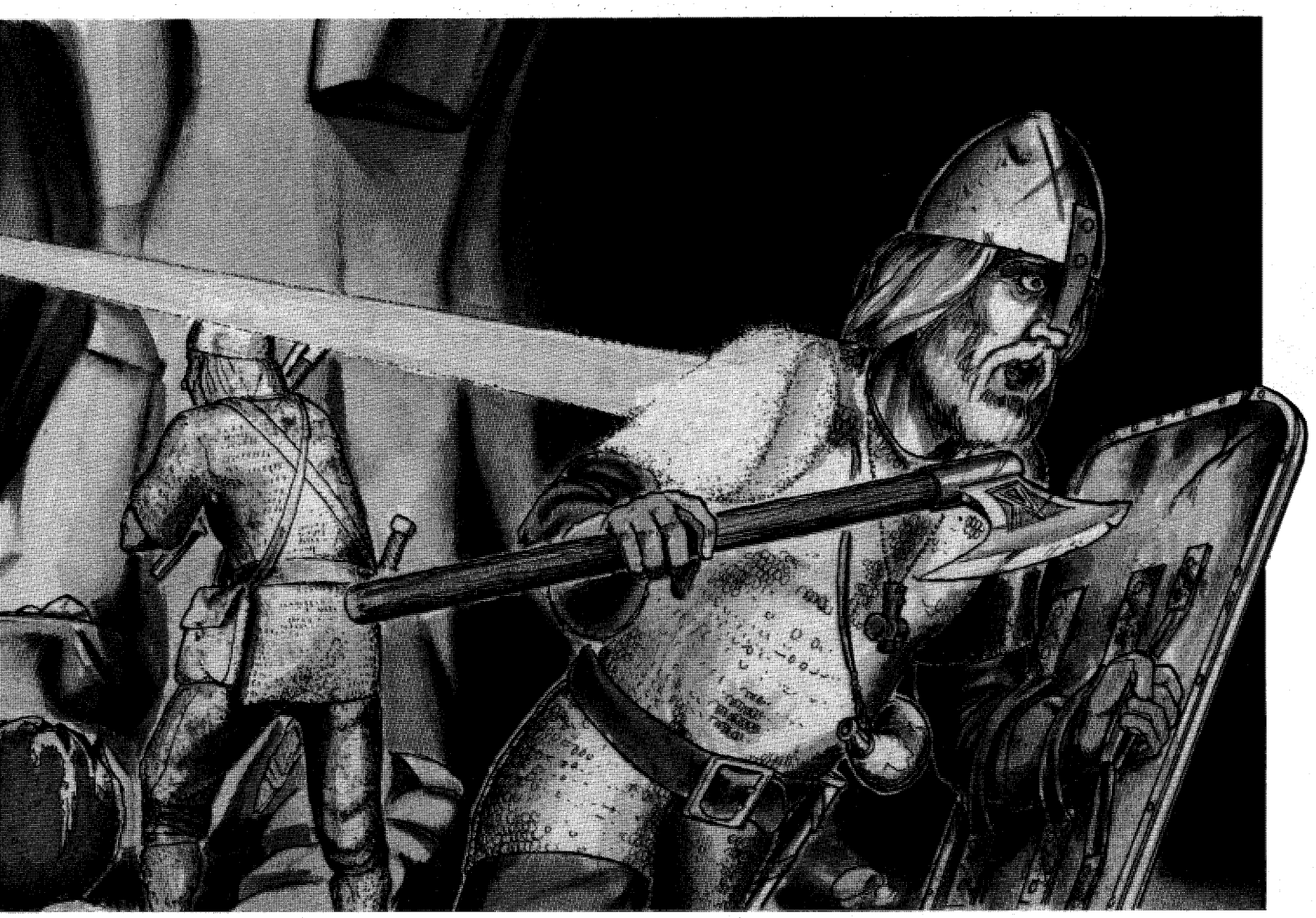
"From atop this armored sphere project ten eyestalks, each of which has a limited maneuverability and field of vision. These eyes, however, do more than just see. They are also able to project, instantly and at will, various spell-like powers of awful effect. Flesh may be turned to stone; armor, weapons, skin and bone disintegrated; charms may be projected, and the influence of death magic itself may be brought to bear.

"And there is also an eleventh eye, greater in diameter than the others, set in the midline of the spherical body. This great eye can project an anti-magical ray that negates the use of all spells, whether cast from a device or from the mind and hands. This ray is a faintly visible beam of grayish light, extending out from the eye in a conical shape up to 140 yards from the monster. This cone is one foot across at the eye, and reaches ten feet in diameter at its greatest extent. This beam will focus upon one target at a time, and may be shifted to keep track of a moving opponent. This beam has proven the downfall of many would-be slayers of an eye tyrant."

The sage tossed the chalk aside and rubbed the dust from his hands. The class was utterly silent.

"The diet of beholders," he continued, "is widely varied; of necessity, of course, since they can easily defeat most creatures, and thus soon exhaust their food supply in any given area. They vastly prefer raw meat, in large quantities, though they may also consume plant matter and small quantities of gravel to aid in digestion. They are omnivores who seem able, given the opportunity, to endlessly gorge themselves. Waste matter and indigestibles like bone they spit out, far enough away from their lairs to avoid betraying the hiding places of their wealth. They seem to prefer the flesh of horses, cattle, and humans."

Turning to the slate again, the sage picked up the chalk and sketched out a triangular shape. "You should all be familiar with the food-chain pyramid; at the bottom are plants, upon which feed the herbivores, upon which feed the carnivores, and so forth. Beholders sit at the top of the pyramid, preying upon all things. Because of their power, however, they must spread out widely to allow one



another food enough to eat, and to avoid competition. It is almost unknown for more than one beholder to be seen at a time, though it is known that they will cooperate with their own kind, and they can speak with each other in their own tongue.

"Though evil, they are prone to lawfulness as well and may take on servant creatures by duress or charm to serve as guardians of treasure, or as guardians of the beholder's personal safety. These servant creatures are also a means of implementing the eye tyrant's plans to carry destruction to all other life it encounters, and accumulate magical treasure. Gargoyles are highly favored for such uses, since they are too stupid and too undisciplined to resist the beholder's demands, and not powerful enough to give their master discomfort and perhaps bring about their annihilation."

The sage paused for a breath, then continued with, "We now come to reproduction." While this topic usually brought smiles and giggles to the faces of the class, now the students watched the sage with complete attention. "Once a year, every beholder lays a clutch of one to four eggs, each about a foot in diameter, by expelling them from the internal organ that produces eggs and spitting the eggs from its mouth. These eggs are dead-white, spherical, and leathery in texture and appearance. They have a repulsive odor that repels predators, but which unfortunately leads the more dedicated foes of the eye tyrants unerringly to the clutch.

"The laying of eggs is instinctive, but the beholder consciously chooses the site where the eggs will be left — always far from its lair, and usually upon a rocky, desolate height. Such spots have been used by beholders over many centuries, and it is thought that all such creatures remember their birthplaces and return there to lay their eggs. After being laid, the eggs will hatch in two to twelve months; egg-laying and hatching occur in no particular season.

"Once laid, the eggs are left alone to their fate. Few beholder eggs hatch any more; humans, demi-humans, and humanoid races all will go to great lengths to destroy them. And the influence of nature, with its storms and diseases, must be accounted for as well. Those eggs that survive will swell and grow over time until just before hatching, when they are three feet across. The young beholder then expands suddenly, splitting the shell apart, and it is free. At this time it eats its own shell, and is immediately capable of using all the powers of its parent. Its bite is less powerful, much like a dagger thrust in effect, and certain of its magical influences are at reduced effectiveness, but it will grow within a year's time to be as dangerous as any other of its race."

The sage settled himself against the stone table he used for a lectern. "The life span of a beholder is unknown, but thought to be very long indeed. One specimen has survived, if the legends about it can be trusted, for nine hundred seasons. As for social and philosophical aspects of the beholder's existence . . . your guesses equal mine for accuracy. They desire the extinction of all species but themselves and those they can manipulate to increase their power and influence. This is almost all that is known of their innermost thoughts and designs."

There the sage paused and looked about the class expectantly. After a moment, the young boy who had caught the sage's attention earlier spoke up. "Teacher," he said, "what is the best way to kill one of them?"

I knew you would ask that, thought the old man to himself. He looked over the heads of his audience, at a point far away. "The best way to kill one of them . . . . That is difficult to say. In combat,

beholders prefer not to close with an enemy, and will stand off a distance to use their spells. The little eye that performs telekinesis will come into play first, to hurl missiles at its opponents, catch light opponents and cast them into the air to be dropped, or to deflect oncoming missiles one at a time.

"The great eye, with its anti-magical influence, will focus on anyone who appears capable of spell casting, that is, anyone not wearing armor. As for closing with it, that cannot be done in the outdoors since it will levitate itself up out of the reach of weaponry, while tilting itself and allowing its eyes to continue to do their work. Perhaps the best way to slay one would be to attack it at long range with masses of archers, stout and paid well, and supported well by magic-armed fighters in case gargoyles lurked about. One could put poison in baited traps to catch the creature unawares, though a long wait is assured. One could use arcane and enchanted devices at either a great range, or at a closer range with the aid of protective rings or cloaks, and hope that the protection is enough. . . ."

At this juncture the sage's voice faded away as he looked into the eyes of the boy who had asked the difficult question. He remembered that the boy was a member of a nearby church, one that was rather strict and on the militant side, but a good church nonetheless. . . . And wasn't it said that this boy was taking some kind of special training?

"Or," the sage went on, "someone who was immune to most of the magical powers of the beholder, such as a paladin with a holy sword — such a person could catch a beholder in its underground lair, and would stand a good chance of closing with it to destroy it in combat."

The boy nodded, apparently satisfied.

After another pause, the sage dusted off his hands again. "Class is over. I will see you all again tomorrow morning." He reached around behind him for his books and scrolls and carefully piled them up to take them back to his library. Before he left he turned one last time to follow the progress of the boy who had asked the question, but the youth was lost in the crowd of children who were now scattering to the four winds.

"Good luck," said the sage in a soft voice, as if to himself. Then he too took his leave of the amphitheater, and all was quiet again.

Appendix

1. Whenever a hit is attempted on a beholder, roll percentile dice to see where the hit might land:

01-75: Hit vs. AC 0 body (takes two-thirds of hit-point total of beholder before creature is slain).

76-85: Hit vs. AC 7 main (11th) eye (takes one-third of hit point total of beholder before eye is destroyed, but beholder still alive).

86-95: Hit vs. AC 2 eyestalk, one only; roll d10 and use chart on p. 10 of the Monster Manual to determine which eyestalk is hit. Beholders with 45-54 hp have eyestalks that take 8 hp damage each before being severed; 55-64 hp beholders have eyestalks taking 10 hp damage; 65-75 hp beholders have eyestalks taking 12 hp damage. If severed, eye in question will cease functioning.

96-00: Hit vs. AC 7 small eye, one only; roll d10 as above to determine which eye is affected. Any hit on a small eye immediately destroys it and its powers.

2. The magic resistance of a beholder is listed as "special" because of the anti-magic ray emanating from the 11th eye. The ray, as stated by the sage, only causes magic spells and spell-like powers to cease functioning within its area of effect; the "plusses" of a magic sword, for instance, would remain functional (since this is not a spell-like power), but a *wand of fireballs* would not be able to cast a *fireball* spell while the ray was enveloping it and its wielder.

3. Beholders are considered as aerial maneuverability class A, despite their slow speed.

4. Newly hatched beholders may be considered to have 45 hp, and *charms, sleep, slow,* and *death* spells they cast are saved against at a +2 bonus. Unhatched beholders are AC 4, have no attacks, and take 25 hp to destroy.

5. The spell-like powers of the beholder's eyes work instantly, in the first segment of a melee round, but must "recharge" for the rest of the round before firing again.

6. Beholders may levitate themselves without limit, to the height of the breathable atmosphere.

7. The arrangement of each beholder's eyes is different from nearly all others; referees should work out this detail prior to combat to determine which eyes may fire in which direction, since the small eyes cannot point in just any direction.

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The ecology of the unicorn

by Roger Moore

"You would know about the unicorn?" asked the dryad. Her green eyes widened. "You are a hunter?"

After I assured her that I bore no weapons or armor, and sought to learn about the unicorn for my own curiosity, the dryad looked at me with head tilted. "Most of the mortal folk hunt the Free One for its horn, the magical horn, they would slay it, take its horn, iron in their hands and ice in their hearts, and we who loved it are left with the body, such is the way of the mortal folk. Long the Free One runs, far the Free One travels, deep the Free One hides from the mortal folk. The horn is its heart as the unicorn is the forest's heart, would you run if mortals chased you for your heart?" In such a way did the dryad speak, her words and sentences running together like water in a stream.

I bowed my head to hear this; I was not a killer. It seemed the dryad saw this: she bade me sit with her on a mossy stone for a while, and she told me of the unicorn.

The unicorn, she said, is many things. No two people will see the same unicorn, though one may be seen by many. Mortals see it and call it shy, fierce, proud, free, the spirit of magic, the spirit of unconformity, the symbol of purity, truth, change, goodness, chaos, innocence, grace, beauty, secrecy, and a thousand other things. There is truth in each of these, but each of them alone is not enough, and all the words that could be spoken would not a unicorn describe.

To human eyes the unicorn is less like a horned horse than is generally believed; it is smaller and more graceful than a horse, and far more beautiful. Unicorns are generally white in color, though some claim to have seen gray, black, silver and gold ones, and one or two adventurers speak of spotted ones. Their horns are most often a mother-of-pearl color, giving off a rainbow of hues in the sunlight; again, there are reports of silver, gold, and black horns as well. The cloven hooves of the creature are gray or silver. All unicorns have a wild silken mane that flashes in the wind as they run, a tail like a lion or wild boar, and a beard like a goat. Some say, though, that the strangest part of a unicorn is its eyes, for they are many colors at once and change even as one looks at them. No one can well remember the color of a unicorn's eyes.

You will find in the world learned sages who tell you the unicorn is not exceptionally bright, and that if you could converse with one you would get little more than if you'd spoken with an average man who had lived in the woods all of his life. Yet little do mortal folk know of what a unicorn truly thinks. They are older than the calendars most mortals keep, and wiser than most sages. Their knowledge is not of building fires and laying stone, but of the nature of living things, the wisdom learned from watching the stars pass in the night, the endless cycle of nature repeated again and again yet differently every time. They know what is in the heart of a man or a woman, and can read meaning into the turn of the wind, the fall of a leaf, the sigh of a child, meanings no one else knows. Dearly they love secrets, and dearly they keep them.

It may be said that a unicorn lives for itself. It will defend its wood and its friends, but it exists for its own sake and serves no one but its own will. Even magic is powerless to control them; their wildness is too great to be constrained by a dweomer. They eat when it pleases them and sleep when they like; they feast on tender grasses and honeysuckle, sweet roots and bark, and some say they can draw energy from drinking the winds if they need. It is known that the best place to see a unicorn is near a still pond, for they love to look at themselves reflected therein; a vanity, perhaps, but they are entitled to it as well as anyone.

It is true, too, that unicorns are strong. Theirs is an endless strength; they may run for days without tiring at full speed, passing the winds and flashing through even the densest forest growth. "Chasing the unicorn," the common folk say when they mean someone is wasting time; "catching a unicorn," they say of someone doing the impossible.

The powers of the unicorn's horn are debated by serf and king alike. It is known that unicorns cannot be poisoned, and that the horn will protect a man, though to lesser effect, from toxins of all kinds. Yet there are always tales of other, hidden magicks that the horn can perform. A ranger will remember a unicorn coming upon him as he lay dying in the woods of a goblin's arrow; the unicorn but touches the infected wound and it is healed at once. A lost child, when found, will tell of seeing a "one-horned deer" who cured his sicknesses from eating wild mushrooms or berries with a tap of its horn, then guided the child home again. There is even a legend that two lovers, chased into a forest by their enraged families, fell from a low cliff and one of them was slain; the survivor would have died of grief but heard a low sound, and beheld a unicorn coming, who touched the other one once and restored the lost one to life before fleeing. What can be made of all this is beyond even the sages to say; but clearly, one should never take a unicorn for granted.

A unicorn runs more like a deer than a horse, travelling in great leaps that clear the height of a man at times. Because of their speed, there are precious few creatures who will ever get close to one without its permission, and fewer still since unicorns have a magical intuition about the approach of anyone who has evil thoughts or has the intention of harming them. Unicorns avoid all but those of good heart and those who love the forests; the rest see little more than their tails flicking as they leap into the distance, and often they will see nothing of them at all; unicorns love to hide and can be more quiet than an empty cathedral when they want to be.

No one knows how old unicorns become. The dryads say that it is rarer for the moon to turn blue than for unicorns to mate, and the birth of a foal is cause for riotous joy among all the inhabitants of a unicorn's wood. Some elven folk remember tales of their ancestors of generations before, telling of the same unicorn those elves see now, which if true means that unicorns live for thousands of years. The dryad I spoke with had known two unicorns, and neither of them knew how old they were, much less how much time had passed since the week before. If time means little to elves, it means nothing at all to unicorns, and each day to them is special and new. The chaos in them casts boredom aside; a unicorn can watch the same event over and over, and each time will see something new about it to hold its interest.

Who befriends a unicorn? Everyone knows that a maid, old or young, who is good at heart will stand a fair chance of seeing and perhaps even touching a unicorn. Sometimes it happens that the maid may even gain the unicorn's agreement to serve her as a steed, and the unicorn will be faithful to her for as long as the maid is good; the unicorn will suffer no one else to ride it, however, and may not even let the maid ride it if the maid comes to believe she is the unicorn's master. No one is the master of a unicorn.

Druids also like unicorns, not so much for their goodness (druids also like green dragons) but because unicorns are so

much a part of the forests the druids protect. At times a unicorn may give aid to a druid, but always it is because the unicorn chooses to do so, not from any compulsion the druid may exert by charm. Rangers and unicorns seem to do well together, and unicorns will even let themselves be seen by male rangers and touched by them, though only female rangers may ride them. Good bards are known to chase after unicorns, and mad chaotic bards as well; the sight of a unicorn brings bards to tears, and they will write volumes and volumes of poems and tales and songs about their beauty, and recite them every chance they get.

Of the true woodland folk, faeries and elves are among a unicorn's closest friends, and some of them even have speech with unicorns. Dryads, satyrs, nymphs, pixies, and sprites see them often enough, and it is said that treants, who may be the only beings to live longer than unicorns, know more unicorns personally in their lifetimes than any human could guess at. All of the true wood folk except the evil ones love the unicorn and would throw down their lives for it, and even the evil ones would not cause it harm; unicorns are fearful when aroused for fighting, and have slain ogres and worse with a single thrust of their whorled horns.

Who is a unicorn's foe? It is true that they avoid all who are evil, and who would cause them harm. Yet it is also true that those who are selfish and petty, who desire dominion over their fellows, and who are blind to the goodness and innocence of childhood will never see the horned one. If one cannot see beyond the reach of his own grasping hands, he will wander the forests of the world and see nothing at all but trees.

Such was the tale the dryad told me, and I was utterly silent as I heard it, and afterward. I felt the wonder in me rising and my thoughts were adrift; the dryad seemed to know it and she laughed.

"Stranger, I have told you that a thousand words could not say what the sight of one unicorn can, and you look as if you've seen one a'ready."

"Your story has caused it," I replied, embarrassed. "I am no one like a bard or a prince or a ranger; I am a wanderer and the road is my home. I have heard many tales and seen many strange beings in my years, but never such a creature as you have told me."

The dryad's eyes twinkled merrily. "And if you were to see one, what would you do?"

I thought for a moment and laughed myself. "In truth I have no idea. Perhaps all in all, I would do nothing but wonder at it. Beautiful things are rare in the world, and, for myself, to be lucky enough to see a unicorn would be all I could ask."

"Lucky thou are, then," said the dryad. "Look over your shoulder, slowly and with care." Her eyes were shining like stars and her face glowed with awe. She was looking behind me.

For all of my life I remembered that moment, as I watched her face and it dawned on me what she meant. In that moment I had an awareness of someone near me, very close to me, someone I had sought all my life. Even though I am older now than almost any man, I still remember the last few seconds before I turned around, and in the light filtering through the leaves and in the silence of the primeval wood, beheld the unicorn.

APPENDIX

Unicorns are also known as alicorns, monocorns, and have the technical name of *monoceros* in sages' texts.

If desired, the awe effect of seeing a unicorn may be simulated by giving them a charismatic power that causes all creatures and beings with less than one hit die to be rendered immobile upon seeing one for 1-3 rounds; more powerful creatures will be able to act normally, but the sight of a unicorn will still affect them deeply in some manner. Good beings will love and admire them, neutral ones will seek to control or capture them, and evil

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ones usually hate them, for the unicorn's beauty reminds them of the ugliness of their souls.

Unicorns may be treated as having a 25 wisdom for purposes of immunity to *charm* and *hold* spells or powers, as per the DEITIES & DEMIGODS™ Cyclopedia; *animal friendship, snare, trip,* and *sleep* spells, as well as any other enchantment/charm spells, do not affect them either. They will note a *hallucinatory forest* for the illusion that it is. Being immune to *death* spells covers all enchantment/charm, conjuration/summoning, or necromantic spells that cause death with or without saving throws (including *finger of death, destruction, symbol of death,* and *power word, kill).*

If desired, a unicorn may be able (once per day or less often than that) to simulate one beneficial clerical spell of any level with a touch of its horn. The effect of this touch will take place instantly. Unicorns will only use this power if another creature or being is *in extremis;* DMs should use this power with care.

The *dimension door* power of a unicorn will only rarely be used, but it takes effect instantly at the unicorn's desire. A unicorn could, for instance, vanish just a moment before being struck by an arrow or weapon if it was aware of the object's approach, and could even evade a *fireball* as it travelled on its way.

The druid spell *call woodland beings* is not considered a *charm-type* spell; it does not put the unicorn under any compulsion to obey the druid, any more than any other creature called must obey the druid. A summoned unicorn will be aware that a druid is "calling" for assistance and may decide to help (represented by the saving throw vs. spell). In no case will a unicorn approach nearer than 24" from a druid if the presence of any enemy (an evil character or a hunter of unicorns) is sensed, and a unicorn will *dimension door* away if necessary to escape a trap.

Interestingly, lower-level druids have a marginally better chance to summon a unicorn for aid (using *call woodland beings)* than higher-level druids; this says something (indirectly, at least) about the unicorn. The way the spell is moderated, a lower-level druid has a better chance of *failing* to attract those woodland creatures mentioned ahead of the unicorn on the list, which means the chances for that druid to *succeed* in calling a unicorn (the last entry in the sequential list of possible creatures) are correspondingly better. And in the long run, a unicorn is more liable to heed the summons of a lower-level druid because (a) the druid is relatively more likely to need help and (b) a lower-level druid would not be seen as much of a potential threat to a creature as powerful and versatile as the unicorn. ♍

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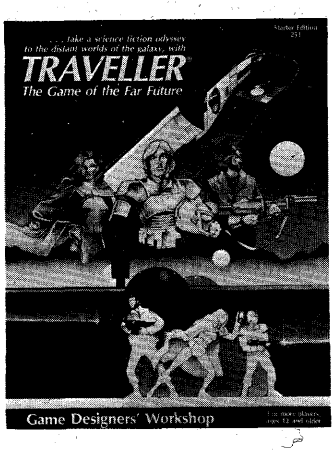

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The ecology of the mind flayer

As told by someone who ought to know

by Roger Moore

It wasn't so much the way the visitor looked as the way he appeared — the assembled adventurers had expected him to enter through the doorway like everyone else. The visitor instead faded into being from the very air itself in the center of the room, as hardened warriors and cynical thieves stepped back from the apparition in fear.

It was Melakar the White-Bearded who first recovered his bearing. He cleared his throat and stepped toward the visitor.

"Greetings, and welcome," he began. "We sent messengers into the astral plane asking for those who would, for a price, tell us about the race known as mind flayers, to satisfy our own curios—"

The visitor hissed between thin lips, and the mage stopped and paled.

"Don't play with me," said the visitor. "You and your guests are planning to raid a mind flayer lair you've heard rumor of, and you are desperate to know more about the creature beforehand. Surely, old fool, you didn't think to hide that from a telepath, and especially from a githyanki knight." After a moment the visitor smiled wickedly, and his pointed teeth gleamed. "Ah, you did think you could hide it." The githyanki looked at the adventurers around him. "None of you can hide anything from me! Take your hands from your weapons! Should you do the least harm to me, the vengeance of the githyanki will destroy you all!"

Slowly the adventurers around the room forced themselves to relax. The githyanki warrior also assumed a calmer posture, and then turned back to the mage.

"Speak quickly. The gravity of your world tortures me, and even thoughts of your gold do not give me great comfort."

"Where do the illithids, whom men call the mind flayers, come from?" asked the mage in a trembling voice.

The githyanki's eyes narrowed. "Mind flayers are not of your world. They are not of any known world. They have been traveling the planes for so long, not even they know where they come from. From a secure base underground or from a darkened planet they send out projections of themselves to new prime material planes, scouting and searching for a new realm to conquer and enslave.

"Once a realm is discovered, it is doomed; the mind flayers have one of their number remain projected at the new plane while others use their psionic powers to enter the Silver Realm, that which you call the astral plane. These others then follow the scout's silver cord to the entry point to the new plane, use psionic science to enter that plane, and begin bringing about its downfall. Our mages believe their lost home plane was anti-magical, and that they possess the same nature, for they resist magical influences so strongly that even the most accomplished wizards are taxed to slay them."

"Why do they live only in darkness?" asked an elf. "I've heard they can walk about in the sun like any other monster."

"Wrong. The illithids cannot tolerate light except in faint intensities. Their eyes are not like those of humans or elves;

they have solid white abominations in place of eyes, with no pupils visible. Our scholars have tested and dissected these eyes, and we find that they focus light in a strange manner, so that a sudden bright light will overwhelm the visual nerves and leave the creature in agony. We have found that a magical light spell cast successfully upon an illithid's eyes will send it into spasms. When blinded like this, it is in too much pain to use its psionic powers, and is helpless and easily slain."

The githyanki suddenly turned to his left. "You are correct," he said to a silent dwarven warrior, who gasped and stuttered.

The githyanki continued, cutting off the dwarf's response. "You were assuming that the mind flayers can see into the minds of others as I can, and you are right. For me, the power came as a gift of fate; for them, it is natural to all. However, they cannot understand the thoughts they receive, and furthermore do not care to understand them. They know only their own secret tongue and the languages of their allies under the earth.

"The power they have to read minds is used only to communicate among themselves, each illithid reading the passing thoughts of the other and thinking its own thoughts to be read in turn, and so forth. They are also known to use this talent to detect the presence of other beings, usually intruders in their cities and lairs. True speech they save for their rare communications with non-illithids. They may also cry out from the pain of a light in their eyes, or when cerebral parasites drain their psionic powers."

The dwarf's face tightened and looked more grim than usual. "You would do well to confine your prying to others," he growled. "What I think is none of your business."

The githyanki leaned back and shrieked, in what seemed like a laugh. "None of my business? Fools! Everything here is my business — I wouldn't have come if it were not! You sought a being who knew all the strengths and weaknesses of the mind flayers, and you got me. Who better to ask, you thought, than the greatest enemies of the brain-eaters? The githyanki — the people of Gith, who led us out of slavery and into the Silver Realm, out of the claws and tentacles of the mind flayers! We know more of mind flayers than you would learn yourselves in a lifetime."

A skeletal finger stabbed out at the audience; jeweled armbands jingled and loose brown wrappings swayed from his arms. "I read blind stupidity in all of you. Half of you believe that you need only rush up and hack at them with your pitiful swords, and the rest of you think that your magic will turn the trick."

The githyanki glanced toward the ceiling, then leveled his head again. "I'll tell you what I saw. I saw a mind flayer hit directly with a wizard's fireball spell, and the spell died out! Lightning and cold are almost always wasted on them, as though the attack was never made. They shrug off magic as one of you would brush away a bothersome insect. I saw a githyanki warrior older than any of you here, even you elves, charge a mind flayer — and in seconds it ruined his brain with blasts of mental energy. Three times it hit him — three times! The warrior was dead before he took ten more steps. It took five warriors more to bring the brain-eater down, and I was the only one of the five to come away with my brain and mind still intact."

The room was silent, and the githyanki continued. "Yes, ***brain-eater.*** That's what I said. Illithids relish the brains of humans and similar beings the way you eat the meat of cattle and fowl. To them, eating brains is a symbolic gesture. All illithids believe that they are the master race, the true and rightful rulers of all sentient creatures. They have no kinship to humanity or any other known race. They worship no gods, because they deem themselves the ones who should be worshipped.

"Being as intelligent as they are, endowed with psionic powers, and as physically weak as they are, the illithids believe that the mind is everything and all-important." The githyanki tapped the

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yellowed skin of his temple with a bony finger. "To eat the brain of another race is the ultimate symbol of dominion over that race. They consume that which is important to them. Their tentacles have bony ridges that cut flesh and bone with ease, exposing the inside of the skull. Many collect the skulls of their victims and adorn their bodies with the trophies.

"They have a psionic power that especially helps them achieve their evil ends – a power of domination that they use with pleasure on their victims and those who would attack them. This domination power allows the mind flayer to control every movement of a single victim, to an unlimited extreme. Once, on a raid to an illithid lair, I saw a githyanki captain run himself through with his own sword while under the control of one of them. They would have a far easier time doing the same thing to one of you." The githyanki stopped and scanned the room with an expressionless gaze.

No one spoke when the warrior paused. His golden armor glinted in the torchlight, and dazzling gems of a dozen pure colors flashed from his rings, bracelets, and armor as he stood waiting.

"Come, come," the knight prodded. "I can read a hundred questions in your minds. Ask them out, so I may be paid."

A halfling shifted in his chair. "You said that the . . . illithids . . . live in cities?" he whispered.

The githyanki nodded. "Cities buried deep under the earth, in caverns wider than you would imagine. Each world has only one major illithid city, but many smaller outposts are set up elsewhere in the underlands. The mind flayer lair you intend to assault is but one of many this world supports, and you are nowhere near the major city."

"Where *is* their major city in this world?" called a priest, taking a step toward the githyanki.

The warrior shifted slightly, perhaps a shrug. "Later. Ask again when you have more gold."

"Please, at least tell us more about their cities," beseeched Melakar.

"I can tell you what I have seen. The great cities of the mind flayers are nothing like those you inhabit. They force slaves to carve the structures out of living rock, and then slay all the workers afterward. They use few stairways or ramps because each one can float its body by psionic means and use another psionic power to slow its fall. With these powers they can raise themselves up to escape enemies, and cross underground rifts and rivers without slowing.

"An illithid city is a sight no one forgets. Out of the darkness of a great chamber rise their stone towers, outlined by patches of softly glowing spores that have attached themselves here and there. No sound can be heard from within, except the chittering of their wererat friends and the deep, echoing growls of other creatures who roam their streets.

"They keep terrible guardians. Wererats, beholders, and grimlocks work with them – the beholders on somewhat of a more even basis than the other two races, which are used as fighters in the illithids' wars. Their cities are open to some devils and the rakshasas, but these are rarely seen. Hellcats will serve them, mites will inhabit the ruins around them, and they are known to sometimes employ ogre magi.

"All of these horrible allies have one thing in common – they are not creatures an illithid would eat. Beholders are protected by their armor. Ogre magi can heal their own wounds, wererats are poisoned with the disease of lycanthropy, grimlocks are scaled and foul to the taste, mites are all but brainless, and the rest of their cohorts are all spirits from other planes.

"Why do they keep allies if they are so powerful? Because illithids prefer others to do their fighting and their physical labors, and wish to have a delaying force to hold off intruders while the cowards flee further into their city. A mind flayer city has many surprises, especially in the remote interior."

Melakar pulled at his beard and said in a conversational tone, "I've heard that githzerai also work–"

The githyanki screamed. Melakar shrank back, aghast.

"Githzerai! Mad, traitorous wretches! Rot their souls in eternal flame! They claim kinship with us, the true people of Gith, yet they betray us all by allying themselves with the slavers! Blind they are, and mad for thinking the illithids will not deceive them. If the illithids are good for one thing, let it be for eating the brains of the githzerai – and yours as well!"

Enraged, the githyanki unsheathed his sword faster than anyone could react. Melakar barely had time to jump back as the sword-point swished in an arc at the level of his neck. In the next instant, the warriors around the room drew their weapons and hefted them for a charge at the mad visitor . . .

. . . who was no longer there. Just as quickly as he arrived, the githyanki was gone, the sound of his battle-scream lingering briefly after his body disappeared.

"Has he gone for good?" the halfling said anxiously, looking around the room. "He didn't even get his gold."

Melakar sat down, trembling. The questioning had not gone at all the way he thought it would. No one else spoke, and he looked up at the halfling.

"I wish I knew, my friend. We may not sleep well for many nights to come." Or, thought Melakar, perhaps for many nights more than that. Time passes slowly in the astral plane, and githyanki memories are long. . . .

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the money is yours," the hooded man growled across the filthy table at the Hanging Man Tavern. "None if he lives."

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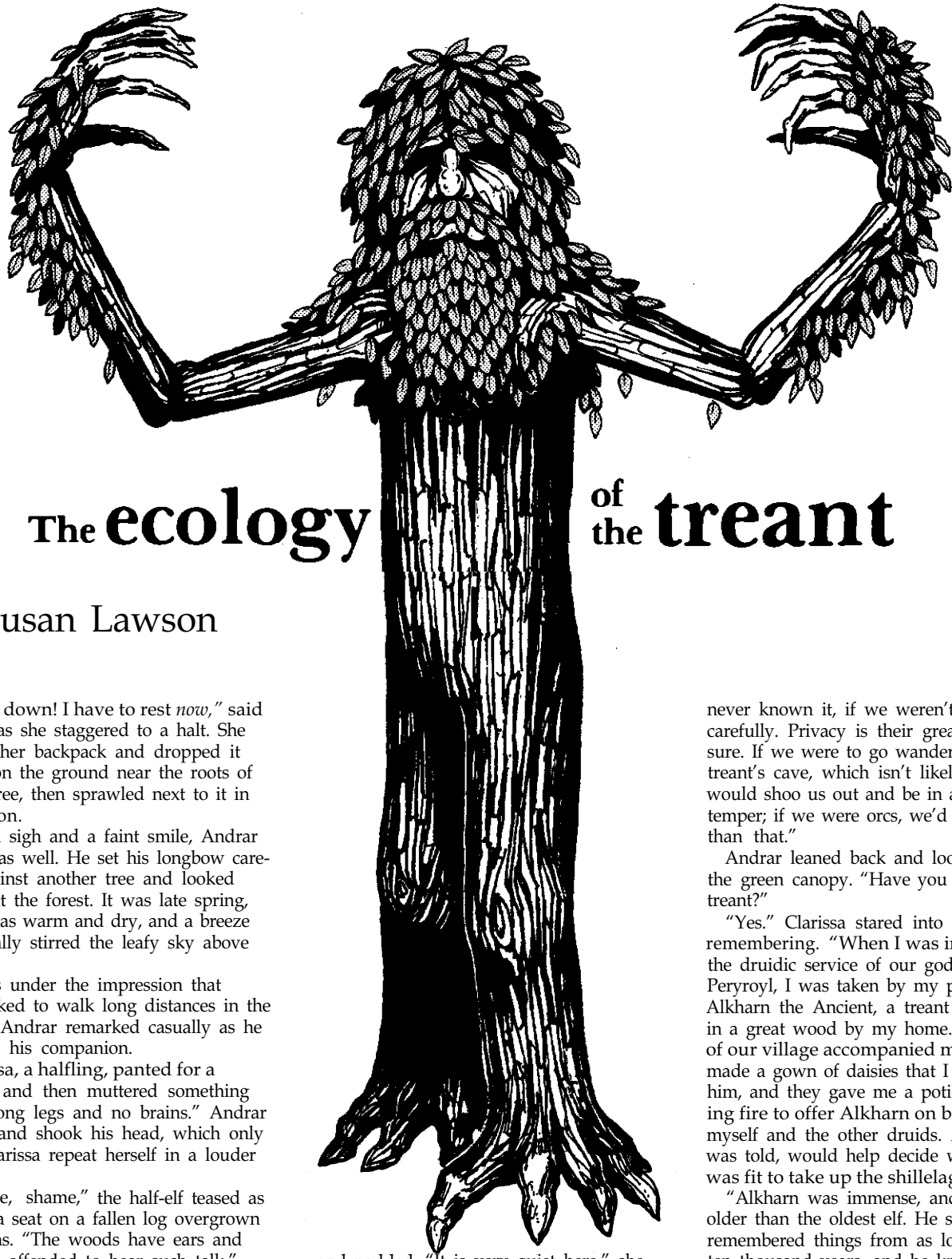


The ecology of the treant

by Susan Lawson

"Slow down! I have to rest *now,*" said Clarissa as she staggered to a halt. She unslung her backpack and dropped it heavily on the ground near the roots of an oak tree, then sprawled next to it in exhaustion.

With a sigh and a faint smile, Andrar stopped as well. He set his longbow carefully against another tree and looked around at the forest. It was late spring, the air was warm and dry, and a breeze occasionally stirred the leafy sky above them.

"I was under the impression that druids liked to walk long distances in the woods," Andrar remarked casually as he surveyed his companion.

Clarissa, a halfling, panted for a moment and then muttered something about "long legs and no brains." Andrar grinned and shook his head, which only made Clarissa repeat herself in a louder voice.

"Shame, shame," the half-elf teased as he took a seat on a fallen log overgrown with ferns. "The woods have ears and might be offended to hear such talk."

"They do, for a fact, and I don't care," said Clarissa. She sat up and shrugged out of her green cloak. "I hurt all over from trying to keep up with you. We're not going to a party or something; we're just here to look for mistletoe. We don't *have* to hurry."

Andrar grinned at her again. "I apologize," he said, then continued in a less serious tone, "Do you really think the trees can hear us?"

Clarissa rubbed her shins as she looked around at the seemingly endless wood, and nodded. "It is very quiet here," she said. "We've seen no sign of evil in this forest, and the trees are well tended. No broken limbs, no blight, the undergrowth is thinned away, and there are no signs of fire damage anywhere." She paused, both for a breath and for effect. "Treants. At least one travels here, probably more."

Andrar looked around with considerably more interest now. "Can you tell where they are?"

The young druid shook her head. "*They* know where they are. We could have passed a dozen of them already and never known it, if we weren't looking carefully. Privacy is their greatest treasure. If we were to go wandering into a treant's cave, which isn't likely, they would shoo us out and be in a bad temper; if we were orcs, we'd be worse off than that."

Andrar leaned back and looked up into the green canopy. "Have you ever met a treant?"

"Yes." Clarissa stared into the distance, remembering. "When I was initiated into the druidic service of our goddess, Sheela Peryroyl, I was taken by my parents to see Alkharn the Ancient, a treant who lived in a great wood by my home. The druids of our village accompanied me. They made a gown of daisies that I wore to see him, and they gave me a potion of resisting fire to offer Alkharn on behalf of myself and the other druids. Alkharn, I was told, would help decide whether I was fit to take up the shillelagh.

"Alkharn was immense, and he was older than the oldest elf. He said he remembered things from as long ago as ten thousand years, and he knew the names of all the kings of the land in all that time, of every race. In order to help him recall them all, he had made the names into a long verse, a memory-helper . . . a nem-something . . ."

"Mnemonic," offered Andrar, proud of himself. If Clarissa noticed the smirk that came over his face, she ignored it.

"That's the word I was looking for. It was a *great* poem. Alkharn said that treants have to create these poems. They have long memories anyway, but they live so long that they'd still forget things if

it wasn't for their mnemonics. I remember part of what he recited to me:

'Hero-king, Telaring, silver-eyed, elven- born,
Goblin-foe, steady bow, ruled long the North.'

"The poem went on and on. It was almost frightening to think of all the ages of time he had seen, and how things had changed so much since his earliest memories. He knew more about his own woods, though, than about any human or elven empires. The rest of the world was a vague memory to him, but Alkharn knew the names of every tree in his wood, and all the ones that had been there since his time began.

"He even recited part of his great poem where he had remembered the names of the trees he had met, but he said it all in his own language and I couldn't understand a word of it. When he spoke to me in my language, it was in a slow and rhythmic drone that I had trouble understanding, but it sounded very relaxing."

Clarissa absent-mindedly smoothed the hair on her feet and brushed the dust from her legs as she continued. "Alkharn said that treants knew many languages, even those of the bears, the birds, and the druids. He told me about the special language that treants share with trees and other treants — nothing spoken, but they wave their limbs and leaves, and touch and make rustling sounds, and all of it just to say 'Hello, how are you?' "

Andrar broke in, remembering one of Clarissa's earlier remarks. "Why did you say treants lived in caves?"

"They don't, really; they live in the outdoors most of the time, but groups of treants keep large caves, in which they store mementoes, brew their drinks, and stay safe from their most feared enemies, lightning and fire. The treants know that fire is often good for a forest, but this is true only for those forests that have no treants moving about to clear away thick undergrowth and decayed wood."

For a moment Andrar was silent, then thought of a story he heard long ago. "My father once told me there was great power in the drinks of the treants. Some who were allowed to drink from their wooden bowls found that they grew stronger, or that they could speak with plant life, and some lived far longer than they and others expected them to. My father said that one of his friends drank from a treant's bowl when he was wounded, and found himself healed of his injuries within seconds."

Clarissa nodded. "Your father's friend was blessed to share drink with them. Only those they trust completely are allowed to do that. Usually, they don't even communicate with ordinary folk, unless one is of the druidic profession like myself, or perhaps a ranger-type, or a bard, and they generally prefer to share their forests with elves, rather than humans or dwarves — or even halflings."

"I didn't think that treants were able to create magical things, though," said Andrar. "That has always confused me. How can they make these potions?"

Clarissa chewed her lower lip, searching for words. "It's hard to say, and I guess no one really knows *exactly* how. Treants make their potions from their own living sap, and add many sorts of materials that they find in the forest or receive in trade from friends like elves and dryads. Some say the drinks must age for many years before they are ready to be consumed. The effects the potions have upon people like you and me are probably related to the effects they have upon the treants themselves. A draught made to give a treant energy would gift me with the strength of a giant. I could throw boulders, bend bars, poke bothersome companions in the nose . . ."

Andrar grinned and tossed a twig at her. "Have your fun. But tell me more. Where do treants come from?"

"They just appear, as far as anyone knows. A young tree that has grown up straight and strong might someday start waving its two largest branches like arms, blink two eyes that were once just thin spots in its bark, and shuffle forward on a trunk that has split into two legs. When it does these things, it has become a treant, but no one — not even the oldest elf or the wisest druid — can predict if any particular tree will do that.

"Any sort of tree can become a treant, and treants have seeds like a tree. But those seeds do not grow into treants. The seedlings grow into trees, and only a few of them ever develop into treants. Then, as a treant gets larger and much, much older, it reaches a time when it turns back into a tree once more, forever. It takes thousands of years for a treant to pass to this stage, and they do not fear it as we fear death. For all we know, they simply fall asleep and dream, for as long as their tree-lives continue.

"This very tree," she said, patting a gnarled and dirty root beside her, "may once have been a great treant. The tree is certainly big enough, and the trunk seems to have a division where legs might have been, here near the base." Clarissa gave the root a final absent-minded pat and then stood up abruptly. "Well, that's all I have to say, and we're supposed to be looking for mistletoe."

Andrar, now the reluctant one, got to his feet slowly, then turned and on impulse called out to the forest. "Hail, treants! My blessings for your work! The gods grant that you may yet walk another thousand years among us!"

His exhortation over, Andrar reached for his bow — and froze. A rustling sound grew in his ears. The leaves above the halfling and the half-elf moved as if stirred by a quick wind, and then the sound rose into a storm of nature-noise: branches rippled, squirrels chittered, and birds called out to one another. The two travelers felt no breeze against their faces, yet the blast seemed to stir every tree in the wood. After a few minutes, the display subsided except for the calls of the excitable sparrows and larks.

Clarissa's eyes were wide. "By Sheela's daisies! They *did* hear us!"

"I thought you *knew* they were listening," said Andrar, just as shocked.

"I was just guessing, or hoping," she said, picking up her pack slowly. "No need for us to be afraid. The treants are watching out for us, and they wanted us to know that. They just startled me." She hoisted her backpack onto her shoulders and sighed. "Back to mistletoe hunting."

With some of their composure restored, the companions set out again into the woods. This time, it was Clarissa who remembered her manners. She paused at the edge of the clearing they were leaving, picked a daisy from her pocket, and tossed it back the way they had come.

"Good-bye! We'll be back sometime!" she called. Then she and Andrar disappeared into the trees.

APPENDIX

The list below can be used to determine which potions are found in a treant lair, and what their effects on characters would be if they were consumed. Note that any of these treant "drinks" can affect any character who imbibes one, regardless of class.

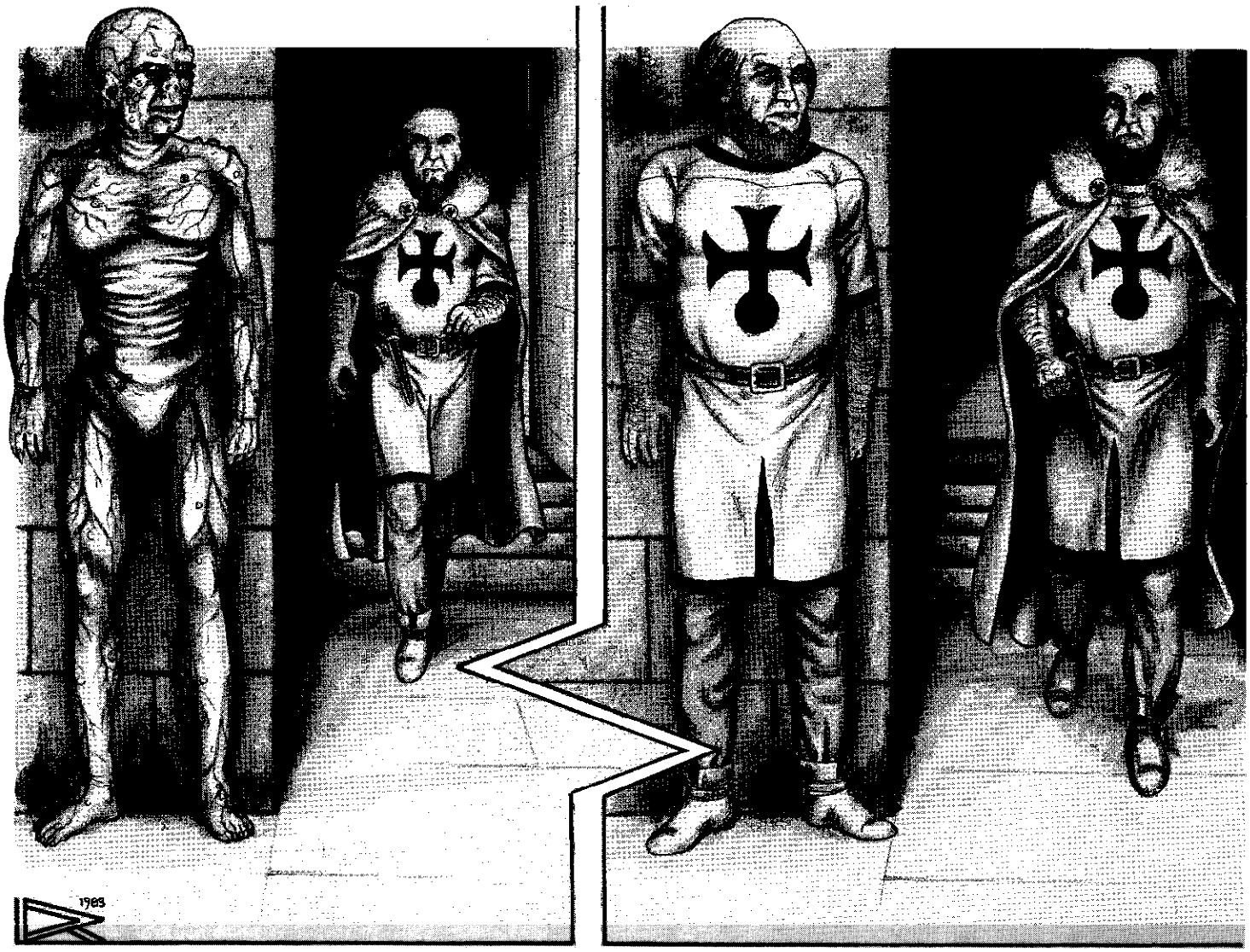
1. *Extra-healing*
2. *Giant strength* (Hill, Stone, or Frost)
3. *Growth*
4. *Healing*
5. *Longevity*
6. *Plant control* (this potion has no effect on treants or trees con trolled by treants)

Treants vary widely in appearance, having variable numbers of branch-like fingers or root-like toes, different types of leaves, and so forth. Individual personalities may vary widely as well, from joyful and outgoing to quiet and introspective.

The only substance besides their potions that treants consume is pure water, which they drink through their "feet" (roots) and mouths. They have no great like for other liquids, and cannot tolerate salt water. Drinking is important enough to them that their words for "understanding" and "listening" are derived from their word for "drinking."

One of the greatest gifts that may be offered to a treant is a *potion of fire resistance.* In exchange for such, treants may offer their services, anywhere within their woods, to good or neutral characters. This offer will be quickly and forcefully revoked if the recipients are careless with fire, cruel to the forest, or prove themselves later to be of evil intent.

Treants and algoids will cooperate if both reside near a lake or swamp. The algoids' immunity to *fireballs* and *lightning bolts* makes them valuable allies. m



The psychology of the Doppleganger

by Fraser Sherman

There were no guards at the door, which was as he wished it; no one must know that the captive had not been slain with its partner. Looking unusually nervous, Nyssan, Baron of Ker, swung open the door and stepped into the room, closing the door tightly behind him.

The chamber — a hastily cleared storeroom — held two figures besides the Baron Alam Arijah, wizard, alchemist, and scholar, bowed low at the entrance of his master. Beside him, bound to its chair by a net of interwoven crimson threads, was a grotesque parody of a human figure, grey and pulpy; its blood-red eyes stared at Nyssan with open malice from out of its warty face. And then, almost in an instant, it changed . . . .

"Good greeting, my lord." Nyssan froze in mid-stride, stunned to see his own image staring mockingly up at him. "Alam, would you release me? I'd like to meet this man who resembles me so much."

"Silence!" Anger replaced shock as Nyssan's gauntlet smashed across the creature's face; up to the throat, twin to his own, he thrust a dagger. "Resume your own form, doppleganger — immediately!"

"As you will. . . ." The doppleganger's voice became more sibilant, less human, as it changed back. Nyssan sheathed the dagger, studying the creature grimly. He and Alam had found it with its companion as one of them prepared to replace the castle chaplain, and after a bitter struggle the baron overcame them. Their soft-looking bodies were surprisingly tough, and in battle they seemed able to anticipate his every move, dodging his attacks easily, then striking through his defenses with unbelievably punishing blows. And, Nyssan's determination to take one of them alive hadn't made the fight any easier.

"Can it break free, Alam?"

"Not from the Blood-Red Chain. Even if it duplicated my form, the Chain would spoil any spells it might draw from my mind." The wizard looked down at the prisoner in fascination. "If I could only duplicate its ESP powers — they're far beyond anything, magical or mental, that humans possess, operating almost constantly without conscious effort. But then, their brains are structured quite differently from ours — they can't be charmed at all, you know."

"Yes, I know." Alam had explained their powers before, as the baron now recalled: how a doppleganger could not only probe surface thoughts and knowledge but also tap

things lying just below the surface, like knowledge of your own identity, and use what it learned and its polymorphing power to replace the victim. After that, it would draw constantly on the minds of its victim's friends, learning what they expected of its new form and changing its behavior accordingly. Some said that even made them more believable than the originals. Then, Nyssan broke off his reflections as he realized his wizard was saying something more.

". . . and after seeing them fight, I believe they use their ESP in combat, sensing your planned attacks and your weakest points — it's this knowledge, not simply their strength, that makes their blows so damaging."

Nyssan nodded curtly. "Yes, that's interesting, I grant you — but it's not what I asked you to learn. Have you found what I sought?"

"Ah, yes, my lord!" Alam's eyes were shining. "I have made a discovery. This is the first time we know of that one has been dissected, because that rubbery flesh of theirs turns rock-hard once they have been dead for a time, making it impossible to cut them open without hacking them to pieces. But thanks to a necromantic preservative spell I cast—"

"Alam!" The baron interrupted, the wizard jumped, and Nyssan forced himself to restrain his temper. "I don't care how you did it — what have you found?"

"It is not the knowledge you sought, my lord, but it is remarkable nonetheless. My lord, the doppleganger is human!"

"What?" The baron stared at the creature, which was glaring at Alam with renewed contempt. "That . . . thing? Human?"

"My dissection of the one we slew leaves no doubt. There are several strange anomalies — the brain structure, for example — but their internal organs are basically those of a man. Perhaps it was some wizard's experiment that mutated them, perhaps not, though magic in the blood would explain why they are so resistant to spells. But I have no doubt that their ancestors were men. Oh, when I present this discovery, that fool Wegtha's theories will be—"

"Enough, Alam!" The wizard jumped again, and Nyssan struggled to stay calm. "I am overjoyed with your discovery, my friend, but — you say you learned nothing of what I wanted to know?"

"Nothing." Alam's jubilation dimmed. "It refuses to speak, and cannot be charmed. I am sorry, baron."

"Do not be — yet. It's my turn, now." He reached out and grasped the doppleganger's chin, forcing it to look up at him, but it jerked away angrily. "Unhand me, human!"

"Human? You heard Alam — we're both human!"

"Once, perhaps, but not now, Does a butcher claim kinship with the cattle he slaughters?"

Nyssan grabbed its chin again, hard. "Listen, my haughty friend, I stabbed one of you to death yesterday and I won't hesitate to repeat the feat if you cross me!" He let his hand drop. "But if we reach an accommodation, you will live. You may even profit. So, bargain with your 'cattle' or die."

The doppleganger stared at its captor for nearly a minute; whatever it saw seemed to give it an answer. "Very well . . . human. What do you want?"

"Reasons, doppler — I want reasons! Why did you seek to impersonate my chaplain? Why do your kind always take the shape of men, or elves, or gnomes, or dwarves? What do you want?"

"We want what is ours!" The force of the reply made Nyssan back up a step. "I ***chose*** your chaplain — his life was to be mine! His wealth, his fine robes, his women — had you not interfered, they would belong to me!"

"So that's all it is. You prey upon our lives, usurp them for your own. Parasites!"

"For what else were we made? Your foolish wizard amuses me, babbling of magic and experiments. It was the gods who chose us to bear these powers! We are the select, the exalted — your lives are ours by right. Your only purpose is to serve us, to build up your lives and then surrender them to us."

"I see. . . ."

Nyssan was about to say more, but Alam spoke up, his eyes alive with eagerness: "Wait a moment, doppler — oh, don't you have a name?"

"Not for such as you," spat back the creature.

"Doesn't matter. But what you said — about his women —"

"Alam! This is hardly the time!" scolded the baron.

"My lord, you don't understand. One of the anomalies I found was the absence of any reproductive organs, either on the dead specimen or this one. This has to mean—"

"You're quite clever, wizard." This time, the hissing voice was slightly less contemptuous. "No, we cannot reproduce except in your form. That is the other function of your species — to tend our young as birds tend to a cuckoo. We look completely human when we are born, though some of our organs do not function the same as yours. We grow, unsuspected, among you until maturity. Then comes the change, and with it our minds are filled with awareness of what we are."

Alam was almost ecstatic over this new revelation, but then he paused, suddenly thoughtful. Flushing, he turned back to the baron. "Forgive me, my lord; I digress from your goal again."

"Oh no, no, Alam, anything but!" Nyssan almost quivered with excitement as he grabbed the sorcerer's arm. "It's perfect! Everything I could have hoped for."

"Nyssan, I do not understand."

"You will, old friend, you will." Nyssan beamed down at the doppleganger; he was no longer nervous at all. "Doppler, tell me — how would you like for me to give you your birthright? Luxury beyond your wildest dreams — gold, furs, servants, as much as you desire. If you choose, I can procure it all."

The doppleganger said nothing, but Nyssan looked into its eyes and smiled at what he saw. "Let me explain. On the morrow, Lohirin of Fearchor Keep comes to speak with me. His master, Duke Thysal, has made outrageous, impossible demands to me, claiming that half my lands belong to his dukedom by ancient right. Worse, the upstart has friends, powerful friends in the capital, friends who have the king's ear." Nyssan's face was a study in gloating triumph as he drew the dagger again — and this time placed it in the doppler's doughy, grey hand as a symbol of the baron's trust and confidence that this strange new ally would find the bargain attractive. "Lohirin of Fearchor is the Duke's trusted friend. the only man living who can enter his presence armed. Do you understand now what it is I want you to do?"

APPENDIX

Since the doppleganger's armor class and attack damage are partially derived from its ***ESP*** abilities, it will suffer against an ***ESP***-proof opponent, such as a monk, or a character with the psionic discipline of ***mind bar.*** Against such foes, its armor class will equal leather armor (AC 8), and it will do only 1-6 points of damage per attack.

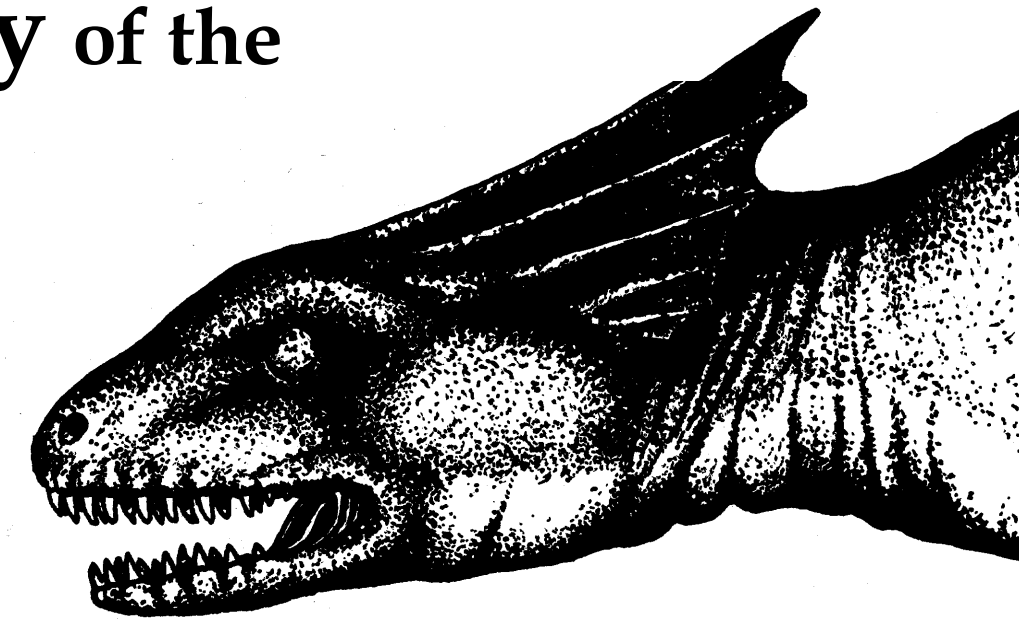
A doppleganger's ***ESP*** abilities are considerably different from the ***ESP*** spell or the psionic power of the same name. A doppleganger can continuously monitor the surface thoughts of any one character at a time, but can also probe more deeply into the character's mind, becoming aware of deeply hidden facts about the character's life, nature, and habits. This furthers the illusion that the doppleganger actually is whoever it is imitating, and adds to its combat abilities.

Dopplegangers have never been known to sleep; they appear biologically incapable of it, though in their altered forms they will, of course, pretend to be asleep when such action is appropriate, and/or when it will prevent them from being discovered for what they are.

Though dopplegangers can form their bodies into the appearance of clothing, equipment, weapons, etc., they generally avoid doing this because of the obvious problems they would have if asked to drop. something they appeared to be holding or wearing. Often they simply borrow materials from the body of whomever they are imitating and wear or carry those.

Though listed as being neutral in alignment, dopplegangers might be more correctly viewed as neutral evil, or at least neutral with evil tendencies. They show little respect or concern for humanity and allied races, except when doing so benefits them. They are not prone to go out of their way to promote wickedness, however, and can act in a helpful manner . . . again, when it suits them.

The ecology of the basilisk



by Ed Greenwood

From an untitled tome in the library of Sulphon of Waterdeep, signed "Rhaphodel, Sage of Sages": *(AD&D™ game notations and other comments added by the author appear in italic inside parentheses.)*

Know, O sage, that a creature often asked about is the dreaded basilisk, whose gaze turns one to stone. It behooves a sage to wax wise and eloquent about this beast, for therein lies the seeds of much respect for yourself and your learning.

The basilisk is a large, reptilian brute that is both slow and stupid. It is feared for its infamous gaze, which can at will turn creatures (including both fish and fowl) who meet it to stone. So much any half-wit can tell you, but mark well the words that follow, for here is set down all that is known of the truth about the gaze of the basilisk.

Precisely how the creature's gaze works is a mystery; most learned observers agree that the creature's eyes emit a radiation that if absorbed by the eyes of other creatures — or even itself, if its gaze is reflected back upon it — causes an inexplicable chemical change in the bloodstream, altering living flesh to stone. *(Stoned creatures are immediately paralyzed, unable to speak, see, or feel. They will become unconscious from lack of air at the end of 1 round, but until then are capable of mental — i.e., psionic and some magical — activity Any spell or device supplying air, or removing the need for it, such as a necklace of adaptation, will allow continued mental activity, with a cumulative (intelligence score +1% per turn) chance of insanity due to helplessness and total isolation.)*

Clothing, accoutrements, and the like carried or worn by victims are not affected, despite some wild tales to the contrary. Beings who through natural ability or the use of magic are in *gaseous form* are also apparently immune to the effects of the basilisk's gaze. *(The use of invulnerability potions allows a saving throw vs. petrification at +2. Any rings or cloaks of protection being worn add their bonus to the saving throw.)*

A basilisk has two translucent eyelids, somewhat like the membranes covering the eyes of a frog, that can at will cover each of its eyes: an upper eyelid, which drops from above, and when thus closed overlaps an inner, lower eyelid, which rises from below the eye. With the upper and lower eyelids covering the eyes, a basilisk can see up to 15 man-lengths away *(9" in AD&D scale)* in normal light, much as men do. Each eye's lids operate independently of each other, and are controlled by the creature; it need not blink at all, if no irritants get into its eyes.

When the upper eyelid (only) is drawn back, a basilisk's eye sees up to 18 man-lengths away *(11" in scale)* on the prime material plane, with the benefits of both ultravision and infravision. Or, by concentration, it can scan the astral plane, seeing up to 12 man-lengths distant *(7" in scale),* or the ethereal plane, seeing up to 18 man-lengths away. A basilisk cannot see on more than one plane at once, but unless they are actually fighting or hunting in one particular plane, basilisks tend to flick their gazes from plane to plane every minute *(every round),* and thus remain aware of their surroundings in all three planes.

When its inner, lower eyelid is also drawn back — and both eyelids can be raised *and* lowered again in less than five seconds — a basilisk's gaze petrifies all who meet the stare of one of its eyes on the prime material plane, slays all who meet its stare on the astral plane, and turns ethereal creatures who meet its gaze into inanimate, insensible "ethereal stone ." Note that a basilisk's eyes are on opposite sides of its head, and thus it commands a very wide field of vision *(a 260-degree arc),* and can conceivably stone creatures to either side of it — two, in total in the same minute.

Fortunately for those who encounter it, the basilisk is not particularly energetic or cunning, and it simply will not comprehend the properties of a mirror or other reflective device if such is maneuvered into position, and will readily "stone" itself if such precautions are successfully applied.

Petrified creatures cannot be eaten by basilisks, and they will therefore strike with their petrifying gaze only at creatures who by size or aggressive behavior seem threatening to them. Petrified victims are subject to all of the effects that stone normally suffers. *(These effects include chipping, frost damage and other weathering, attacks from a horn of blasting, etc., and these may well destroy the unfortunate individual. Contrary to some fireside yarns, stoned people who are chipped or shattered do not bleed. Petrification does not otherwise slay creatures, who are held in a sort of suspended animation, or "stone sleep." Protective devices retained by a petrified victim —a cube of frost resistance, for example — will continue to function.)*

Basilisks eat all types of small creatures (including both fowl and fish), carrion, and some berries. They cannot eat or physically attack creatures not on the prime material plane, and apparently only use their gaze attacks in a defensive manner with respect to creatures thereon. It should be noted here that some sages dispute this point. Further research, dangerous though it is, will be necessary to remove all doubt as to the powers of the basilisk on the astral and ethereal planes, and possible prey it may seek from those planes.

Basilisks instinctively avoid looking directly at other basilisks, and they never deliberately use their stoning gaze on one another. They can recognize fellow basilisks by both sight and smell, and although their sense of smell is not noticeably keen with respect to hunting down other creatures, it is sufficiently acute to distinguish between individual basilisks; i.e., mate and young are readily discerned from strangers.

Any basilisks encountered will be solitary hunters, a mated but hunting pair, a nesting pair, or a pair with grown but immature young still sharing a lair. Such young often accompany their parents for up to three seasons, until they are ready to mate, whereupon they leave their parents and each other to seek out their own mates. Basilisks mate for life, and by instinct breed every four summers — usually in water,

which helps to support their slow, heavy bodies. One or two days after mating, the female lays a cluster of greenish-white eggs (from *1-8),* each about the size of a man's fist. Basilisk eggs have soft, warm, stretchy surfaces, and they withstand crowding or even gentle handling and tumbling without harm; they cannot break the way a duck's or hen's eggs will shatter in similar circumstances. A basilisk parent often picks up an egg in its mouth to carry it, drops it in a new location or to defend itself, or rolls eggs about with its snout — all without doing the eggs any damage. After laying its eggs, a basilisk mother covers them in cool sand or half-buries them in cool, wet mud. The eggs are almost always (95% chance) fertile, and if they survive the nesting period of four to six weeks *(31-50 days),* they will hatch into miniature basilisks, 4 to 9 inches long, who have full gaze powers at birth. During the nesting period, the parents do not eat, all the while growing more and more irritable and fanatical in the defense of their nest and its surroundings. Hatchlings grow quite rapidly, reaching man-size in length (from nose to base of tail) in 4 to 6 months after they are born. During this growth period, their parents hunt intensively with them and for them.

Like other reptilian creatures, basilisks are cold-blooded. They derive much of their energy from the heat of the sun, and spend much time sunning themselves on rocks or heights to gather this heat. (They will also often creep up to campfires at night for the same reason.) But unlike most reptiles, basilisks can tolerate a fairly wide range of temperature, and can also store heat efficiently in their coiled digestive organs; thus, they remain active on warm or mild nights, even in early spring or late autumn. (Basilisks who live deep underground always have ready access to volcanic heat — and if these subterranean creatures are kept from this heat source for any longer than a day, they will grow sluggish and ultimately perish within another three days.) Like their smaller kin among the lizard population, basilisks can regrow lost limbs and tails within 1 to 4 months, provided they have an above-average supply of food during this time.

Because of its fearsome petrifying power (which, it should be noted, is permanent; affected creatures are not freed by its "wearing off"), the basilisk has long been a source of fascination and magical power to men. Mages and alchemists have found two parts of a basilisk eye particularly useful: the internal pupil, lens, and fluid of its eye which are used as ingredients in potions, spell inks, and the making of items (such as *eyes of petrification)* concerned with petrifying creatures; and the inner membrane or eyelid of the creature, used likewise in magic concerned with protection against petrification. Other parts of the basilisk are sometimes tried for such purposes, but with little or dubious success. An intact eye might bring as much as 1,000 gp from an alchemist; parts of it, such as the eyelid or fluid, up to 400 gp each. Prices vary with demand, of course, as with all rarities, and have been known to reach ten times these amounts.

Various individuals have attempted to use basilisks as guardians, usually chained in a particular location, and fed by hooded attendants, or led about by them with a collar and several chains. This tactic can be effective, but eventually fails more often than not simply because of the nature of the beast and its powers. Basilisks are stupid, lazy, and often asleep. If they feel secure — they are not intelligent enough to remain constantly vigilant if no obvious threat is afoot — then they will not look about and repeatedly scan all three planes, and at such times they may be slain or hooded from the rear without great danger to the intruder or interloper they are supposed to be guarding against.

And even if a basilisk guard is successful in its stoning attack, the victim is impossible to interrogate (or rescue, if the wrong person is petrified by accident), and difficult to move out of the way — except by the use of expensive spells and magic items. If more than one basilisk guard is used in the same general area, they inevitably stone each other when tricked by cunning intruders, and starving or beating the beasts does not improve their drowsy indolence or lack of alertness. They are simply too stupid to be trained where to go or not go, or to distinguish between acceptable victims and persons who are not to be petrified. Despite all this, intact basilisk eggs usually bring up to 500 gp each, and a miniature young one is worth as much as 700 gp. Mature, less tractable specimens usually carry a price of 450 to 500 gp.

The effective petrifying range of a basilisk's gaze seems to be a function of how keen the eyesight of its victim is; although this tends to be only up to about 5 man-lengths distant *(3 " in scale),* cases have been reported of wizards employing *wizard eye* spells being stoned by basilisk guardians, and persons employing *crystal balls, eyes of the eagle* and similar devices being petrified at great distances.

At present *(the time of Rhaphodel's writing is unknown),* little else is known of the nature of a basilisk's gaze. The foremost authority on the subject is widely believed to be the sage Krammoch. of Baldur's Gate.

The ecology of the peryton

by Nigel Findley

"Hearts!" The younger mage brought his fist down on the table with enough force to make the tankards jump. "Explain that to me! Why hearts?"

I maintained my aloof manner. "Strange creatures have strange habits," I remarked casually. "And what could be more strange than a beast with the head and antlers of a deer and the body and wings of a vulture?"

The young wizard's elder companion sniffed. "An answer that is no answer. We came to speak to Nex — Nex the Collector, Nex of the Arrow — and find that the famous bounty hunter is no more than a child of twenty summers with a disrespectful tongue."

I narrowed my eyes and allowed a half-smile to creep onto my lips. "A *man* of only twenty summers I may be," I said quietly, flicking my glance between the two of them, "but in that time I have seen — and slain —more varieties of creature than you can name, even with all your wizards' learning.

"But," I continued less coldly, "this is beside the point. Perhaps all your questions will be answered by the carcass of a peryton, which I can and will deliver to you for . . ." I paused, making it seem as though I was just now deciding on a price, when actually I had made up my mind as soon as I saw the rich cloth of their robes and the lavish gold chains around their necks. " . . . ten thousand pieces of gold." I leaned back and awaited the storm of protest that was sure to follow.

And, as I had expected, the face of the younger wizard stiffened and became flushed. But, to my surprise, his elder companion only hesitated a moment, then nodded slowly. "The Wizards' Guild is prepared to meet your fee," he said. "Ten thousand gold nobles for a specimen of an adult peryton."

I tried, somewhat unsuccessfully, not to smirk. This kind of dickering I liked; that fee was two times my usual price. "The deal is struck," I said. "Now, of course, that does not include my expenses. . . ."

"You hunt the peryton?" I turned to find the source of the rough, low voice that came from behind me. The man who had spoken wore a deep purple tunic of fine workmanship. On a chain around his neck hung a silver token of a bird. Though almost three times my age, he was well-muscled and seemed to carry himself with confidence. I had brought my hand to my sword hilt as I turned, but let it drop again when I noticed that he was unarmed.

"Yes, good cleric," I said, "or so I intend. If such matters are your concern, join us. My name is—"

"Nex. I know. I am Amhotep." He pulled up a chair and seated himself at the table. "And what do you know about the peryton that you can think of hunting it without showing any doubt or concern?"

I shrugged. "I know that the beast dwells in mountainous regions, such as the peaks two days' ride north of here."

"That hardly seems sufficient ."

My voice hardened and I gestured toward my long bow, wrapped carefully in velvet and propped up in the nearby corner. "I also know that no creature lives. that I have seen over an arrow," I replied. "What more do I need to know?"

"Much more." The cleric's voice grew grim and cold. "Much. Knowledge is power, and ignorance can be death. Especially so if you intend to hunt the peryton with simple clothyard arrows. The arrows or any other weapons you may use — must be ensorcelled, and the magic must be strong, or they will simply glance off the creature's body."

I leaned forward and opened my mouth to comment, but he raised a hand to cut me off and kept talking. "Be still. There is yet more you should know. The peryton faces no such difficulty in slaying *its* foes. The creature's horns are hideously sharp and strong — some say they are magical, but I know better. They inflict terrible wounds, and the peryton wields them with skill worthy of a champion."

"You speak as someone intimately familiar with the beast," I put in.

If the cleric noticed the sarcasm contained in that remark, he gave no sign. "Familiarity comes through experience. When I was younger, I, too, hunted the peryton."

The two mages, who had been listening quietly to the cleric until this point, now turned to one another, exchanged glances, and murmured. I felt their attention being drawn away from me and toward the purple-clad cleric.

"Please continue," said the elder mage, and the cleric complied.

"My three brothers and I journeyed to those peaks you speak of," he said, turning slightly toward me with those words. "We also intended to return with a peryton as a trophy." He laughed mirthlessly. "My brothers — or, to be more exact, their bones —are still there, on those mountain slopes.

"For three days we searched diligently for signs of the creature, without success of any sort. But on the fourth day, the perytons — three of them — found us. We were traversing a treacherous rock face when their shadows passed over us, just as we heard the sound of their beating wings for the first time. Their shadows were as those of *men,* not beasts — a fact which we all observed, and which distracted us for a single fatal instant.

"By the time that instant had passed and we turned to fade them, the perytons were swooping down upon us from out of the sun." The cleric inhaled deeply, let the breath out slowly, and closed his eyes briefly as if in pain. "Two of my brothers died in that first pass, disemboweled by those flashing horns that ripped through leather as a sword through linen. By luck — or by the will of Thoth — my eldest brother and I evaded that first swooping attack. We began to descend the slope quickly, seeking cover, as the two beasts that killed them came out of the sky and landed near the bodies of our brothers.

"Though on the ground it may appear clumsy — almost comical — when airborne the peryton is a wonder to behold and a thing to fear. We were transfixed by horror at the sight of that third dark shape climbing, turning abruptly, making ready for another dive . . ." The cleric shuddered, and for a moment resumed the detached tone he had used earlier in his lecture.

"The creature maneuvers well; in a stretch of only about two hundred paces, it can turn a full ninety degrees while flying at full speed — and it can reach full speed in a mere minute after launching itself into the air. I have seen few creatures larger than a hawk that can equal it." During this interlude, the cleric's eyes were focused on me; now he turned his attention back to the two wizards and resumed the story.

"Running and scrambling, casting occasional glances backward and up at the sky, my brother and I were able to traverse less than one hundred yards down the slope before the third peryton went into another dive, with my brother as its target. And this time he was not so fortunate; though the slashing horns missed him, the peryton's body did not. The creature rammed into his upper body — whether by design or chance I could not tell. He was swept from the small plateau on which he had hoped to stand and fight, and he landed on a tiny ledge some thirty feet below.

"It would have been a blessing if the impact had killed him. As it was, my brother survived the fall, but both legs, and I believe his back, were broken. Unable to move or defend himself, he could still call to me for help that I was unable to give. And he could scream — oh, how he screamed — as the peryton settled on the ledge beside him.

"I escaped with my life, for the simple and dreadful reason that three perytons, and not four or more, swooped down on us that day. And of all the visions that haunt me of that terrible day, the worst was the sight of that vicious third beast tearing my brother's heart from his still-living body."

The cleric lowered his head, brought one hand up to touch the bird-token around his neck, and seemed to be mouthing a silent prayer. The rest of us were silent as well. As much as part of me wanted to do so, I could not bring myself to utter a sarcastic comment, to try to get the wizards again thinking about me and the reason we had come together at this table in the first place.

Then the cleric raised his head and gazed vacantly out at the mages seated across from him. The younger one shifted uneasily, then ventured to speak. "Perhaps, then, you can enlighten us where others cannot. Why do these creatures require the hearts of their victims?"

"The answer to your question is brief," the cleric said. "For reproduction — that much any sage can tell you. But to understand that answer, first you must know some things about the background of the peryton."

By this time I had regained my normal demeanor, looking and acting bored and, I hoped, convincing the others at the table that I actually felt that way. "Explain, then, if you must, and stop leading us along like this," I told the cleric.

He continued in a tone as if I had never spoken. "The origin of the peryton is lost in the backwaters of time," he said. "Many of the wise say that the creature is the result of magical experimentation — but that is not so, though I do not say that there is no magic in the peryton. Rather, the beast is more akin to beings like the githyanki and the mind flayer, in that none of them are native to this world or the plane it resides upon."

The younger mage raised his eyebrows and exhaled a short puff of disbelief, but the cleric was oblivious to this reaction. "The peryton was the dominant race on its home world," he continued. "Though they are all naturally independent and harshly competitive, at one point in their history the creatures banded together to subjugate — or destroy — all that dwelt around them. Such an alliance among chaotic creatures like these could hardly endure, but it did persist long enough to win a world and send advance invasion parties — at least two, probably many more — to establish their outposts . . . elsewhere.

"It is said in the councils of the wise that the first such outpost was established on a great island nation called Atlantis, in a world similar to this one. Exactly what became of that nation I do not know. Perhaps the resistance to the perytons' attempted conquest was too great, or perhaps the perytons overstepped themselves. Whatever the case, the entire island sank beneath the sea in a great upheaval. Though many others believe that this ended the threat of the perytons on that world, I have reason to doubt that stance. There still exists a prophecy that the perytons will bring about the eventual fall of one of that world's greatest cities, named Roma."

"Fascinating," interjected the elder wizard, but then his face took on a doubtful frown. "Yet, how could such a creature as the peryton travel the planes?"

"Through the powers of the mind," replied the cleric immediately. "By using the Talent, or what you might know as psionics. On their home plane, the perytons were possessed of the Talent, and it was through the Talent that the raiding parties intended to enslave this world and others."

"But —" The mage tried to break in, but Amhotep had anticipated his comment.

"Whether the perytons here lost their Talent gradually, over generations, or all at once, I know not, though I would suppose the latter to be true. This world is different from their own in so many ways. . . . The perytons that dwell in the mountain peaks of our world have lost their Talent, but they still possess their fierce, vicious nature and their scheming intelligence."

"What?" I blurted out, unable to control my surprise.

The cleric regarded me with a grim smile. "Oh, yes, my young hunter. They are as intelligent as most men, more so than many. They speak their own language, quite unlike that of any other creature. It is this intelligence, almost always unsuspected by those who would defeat them, that helps to make the peryton such a lethal adversary."

"All very interesting, good sir," said the elder mage, and he seemed to mean it. "But . . . the hearts?"

"That will soon become apparent," said the cleric, then resumed his narrative. "On its own world, the peryton eats nothing but the flesh of its prey. On this world — and, I suppose, others — the peryton is forced to broaden its diet to obtain the balance of elements its body needs. In addition to the flesh of creatures native to this world, it must eat plants and even some inanimate matter such as clay and soft ores.

"How these compounds are utilized by the peryton is, at the very least, interesting. In the same way that certain plants, on this plane and others, concentrate minerals from the soil in their stalks, the peryton assimilates iron and even heavier metals into its system, using these substances to strengthen and toughen its horns. The peryton's attack is not as deadly as it is merely because it is accurate, although the beast does indeed dive with terrible precision. The metals and minerals that the peryton consumes help to make its horns as hard as steel, able to take and hold a dagger-sharp point, unlike the antlers of normal creatures such as deer and elk, which are tapered but still rounded at the tips. A single slash, or a series of punctures, from those horns is enough to pene-

trate or push aside even metal armor, mortally wounding the flesh beneath it. It has been speculated that these metals also help to toughen the peryton's skin and feathers, which is why it cannot be wounded without enchanted weapons; however, I believe otherwise, since the peryton's coat of feathers is soft and downy to the touch. Quite possibly, its immunity to non-magical weapons comes simply from the fact that it is not a creature of this world."

Amhotep paused for two heartbeats, smiled, and nodded in the direction of the two mages. "And now to the hearts. The reason it craves hearts is, in essence, the same reason that it has such a varied diet: for mineral balance. The female peryton needs especially large amounts of the elements iron, potassium, sodium, and nitrogen to produce the metal-like shell of her eggs — if you find one, I dare you to break it open without the use of an acid, such as the one found in the albumen of the egg itself. As it so happens, the tissue of the human heart contains an abundance of these vital substances. Certainly there are other available sources, but none of the others so appropriately matches the peryton's ethos."

"Thank you for that, kind sir," said the elder mage. "We have been more than curious about that aspect of the beast, for reasons I daresay need not be explained to yourself. But a question remains, one you have raised yourself — the shadow."

The cleric smiled; it seemed to please him that the wizard had paid enough attention to remember that remark, and yet he began his response with a compliment that pleased the mage equally. "I would have been surprised had you not pursued that point. What I said, I meant quite literally: When the shadows of the perytons passed over me and my brothers, the shadows were those of *men*.

"When the sun strikes the body of a peryton, feet replace claws and arms appear instead of wings; the horns cannot be seen in the shadow, and the head rounds out to become that of a human — truly a sight that would be at least disconcerting, if it were not already so terrifying. And the shadow remains that way until the peryton has slain its chosen prey, whereupon the shadow it casts is that of its own body, and it then stays in that state until the creature has devoured and digested its prey.

"Whether this is some trick in the mind of the observer, or evidence of a higher power at work, I know not. Perhaps it is an unconscious remnant of their Talent, some power that projects through the creature's shadow the image of the prey it seeks the most — humans. Then, when the beast has killed a human, this instinctive need is fulfilled and, for a time, the peryton ceases to project the human shape. I cannot say which of these ideas is accurate; what I *do* know is that I myself have seen the change from man-shadow to beast-shadow, as it took place upon the vile creature that slew my last surviving brother."

"Truly fascinating," said the elder mage. "You have our sympathy," he added, gesturing toward his companion, "and our respect. But, as you must have already guessed, another question remains. Whence comes all of this detailed information that seems beyond the ken of even the most learned of sages?"

The cleric touched, then caressed, the silver bird pendant he wore. "I am honored by a source of knowledge that is denied, by its very nature, to most of the sages of this land."

The lecture and the questions now seemed to be at an end, and I had to admit to myself that I had been as engrossed as the wizards were in the cleric's story of him and his brothers, and the other things he had to say about the peryton. But, in saying all of it, he had clearly stolen all of their attention — and perhaps their gold as well — from me. I decided it was time to act decisively, and I did exactly that.

"Here," I proclaimed loudly, "is *another* source of knowledge denied to most sages." I reached beneath the table and grabbed my sack, talking while I extracted its contents. "You are the first to see one of my more recent trophies; in fact, I just finished preparing it earlier today. Notice the fine, membranous finish to the wings, and the lifelike position of the arms and hands. A good job, wouldn't you say?"

All three of them stared at the tiny stuffed body I had placed on the table. The cleric was the first to speak.

"A sprite?" he asked, quietly. "But why? These creatures are the most peaceable —"

"And beautiful," I cut in. "Notice the color of the clothing, and the way I preserved the texture of the pale skin."

The cleric slowly rose to a standing position; his face took on an expression I could not read. "Perhaps you *are* the one best suited to hunt the peryton," he said.

Then, suddenly, before I could react, he reached out and rapped me hard in the center of my chest with his forefinger. "You have nothing in here that the peryton could desire."

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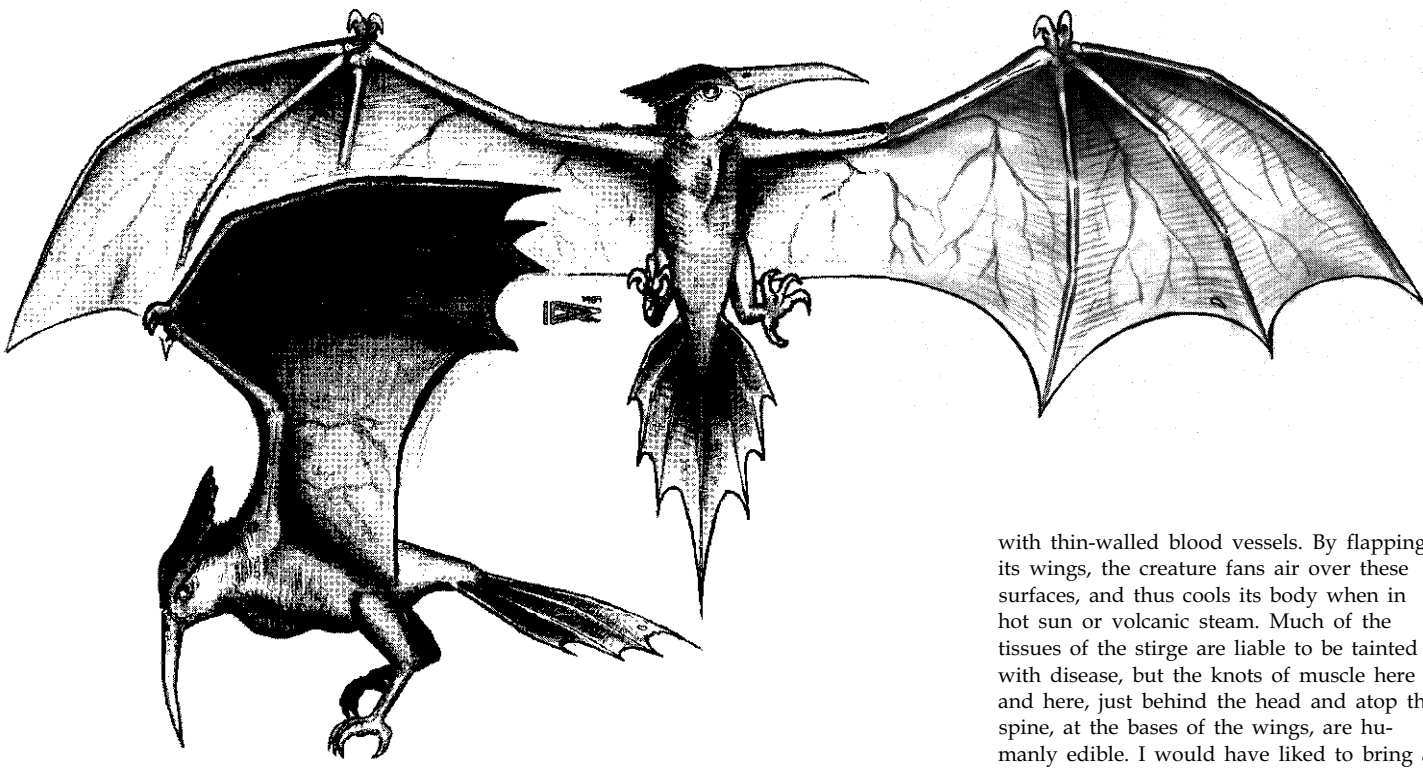

The ecology of the stirge

by Ed Greenwood

From an address by the naturalist Elmdaerle to the assembled Guild of Naturalists in Arabel:

". . . Understandably, little research has been done on the life and habits of that disgusting and dangerous creature, the stirge. I have endeavored to learn what I can of them, and have, as you can see, brought along a specimen.

"No, no, it's quite dead. . . . The stirge, as we all know, subsists entirely on a diet of blood, and will attack all warm-blooded mammals, although it seems to prefer man. Quite often, stirge swarms follow herds of domestic or nomadic animals — cattle, caribou, and sheep being most often afflicted; and where such herds are, one should always expect to meet, and be prepared for, these little fellows. Caravans, traveling pilgrims, and even armed war-bands have been harried through wilderness areas by large flights of stirges; we've all heard the gruesome stories of drained, white victims and a few lucky, narrow escapes. I've studied these creatures for some time, to get at the truth — and the tales and legends, I fear, are not far wrong.

"In flight, the stirge is highly maneuverable[1], and groups of them are capable of cooperative unison attacks and mid-air actions. As you can see, it is really little more than an expandable blood-bag with wings, eyes, and claws — for clinging onto prey — and a long, hollow needle-beak or proboscis, admirably suited for drawing blood. This specimen appears to be of about average size, measuring just under one foot from top of head to tip of tail, and with a wingspan of just less than three feet. The wings may look unusually large, but if they were smaller, the stirge would not be able to maneuver as well as it does when its body cavity is filled with blood.

"The proboscis, properly treated, can serve as a sharp but brittle stabbing weapon, much favored, I am told, by goblins and similar unpleasant creatures. When the stirge is alive, the proboscis contains at its tip a supply of clear liquid, produced in the stirge's body and steadily replenished; this is an anti-coagulant, which mixes with a victim's blood to keep it from clotting in the proboscis or in the stomach where it ends up. The stirge, because of its diet, can transmit diseases — malaria, for instance — from one victim to the next.[2]

"Ingested blood passes straight into the stomach. This serves as a storage bag which the creature always tries to keep at least partially full. From this reservoir the creature draws small quantities into lesser cavities located just beneath its backbone. There its body processes convert blood sugar into body energy, and ingested blood into plasma balanced for its own bodily use, so that it can replace its own lost blood and hasten its recovery from wounds.[3]

"The interior of its wings is interlaced with thin-walled blood vessels. By flapping its wings, the creature fans air over these surfaces, and thus cools its body when in hot sun or volcanic steam. Much of the tissues of the stirge are liable to be tainted with disease, but the knots of muscle here and here, just behind the head and atop the spine, at the bases of the wings, are humanly edible. I would have liked to bring a prepared, sample meal with me tonight, but I was unable to procure fresh stirges — and once a stirge's legs have stiffened after death, no part of its body is safe to eat.

"The creature's claws are not strong enough to be effective weapons for the beast, but they are firmly embedded in its legs and at the midpoint of the leading edge of its wings, and they enable the creature to maintain; tenacious hold once it has attached itself to its prey. The claws serve some cloth-makers and workers for carding wool, brushing away hairs from garments, and so on. They are not strong enough for the fanciful uses attributed to them in the tales of thieves — they are far too brittle and small to serve as grappling hooks for climbing-lines.[4]

"Stirges swarm to attack prey, which is why they are so feared — one can be a formidable foe, but a large group can be deadly to even well-defended creatures. Stirges usually lair in forests, disused castles, or caverns, and may incidentally possess treasure from victims who have fallen to them therein, or from hoards laid down before their arrival, but they are not intelligent enough to value, or bargain with, treasure as we know it. A ranger of my acquaintance tells me that stirges in deep woods like to drive prey into tangled ravines, so that the victims cannot escape readily, or find steady footing, room, and balance to defend themselves properly — and any treasure carried by these unfortunates may well be found among their bones at the bottoms of these ravines.

"Although a thirsty swarm of stirges may seem endless when they're all swooping down at you, typically only three to thirty nest together in a colony, from which they fly out in all directions to find food, usually in groups of three. By means of wagging their probosci, stirges can communicate that

food or a dangerous enemy has been found, its direction, size or strength, and a degree of excitement or urgency regarding the desired reaction of the whole swarm. If a flight of three stirges finds prey, they will circle to observe it, and then two will harry, chase, or if it is strong merely fly along observing it, while the third stirge flies for home. Its message will spread via all the stirges it meets, and to all who call in home at the nest, and they will gather in a group to seek out the prey and kill it. Small prey is merely attacked by the hunting threesome for their own gain, and they give its location only later, if blood yet remains for their fellows.[5]

"Winter cold does not seem to affect stirges in any way, and they breed freely throughout the year. They reproduce by live birth, in litters of one to three young, with a gestation period of six months. Males and females are outwardly identical in size and appearance to our eyes. The tiny young cannot fly properly, but only glide, and are carried on the mother's back for up to four months, until their blood-drinking from prey[6] provides sufficient nourishment for them to grow to about half of adult size. Then they can maneuver on their own, and in another three months at most they reach full adult size.

"I suppose that most of you have never seen a young stirge, and I regret that I could not procure one to bring as a specimen. The adults, however, you all should know: pests feared by man and beast alike. My colleagues Ainsbrith and Bremaerel of Westgate are experimenting with poisoning stirges, but so far report limited success. Just as they are apparently immune to the diseases they transmit, so are they unaffected by the same poisons that harm us; the creatures seem both adaptable and of rugged constitution.

"And that, fellow naturalists, is a brief look at the stirge. As more information becomes available, I will share it with the group, and I will expect each of you to do the same."

Notes:

1. Stirges are flight class A; if their wings are damaged and/or they are fully bloated with blood, and/or they have only 1 or 2 hit points, they may be reduced to Flight Class B or C and 16" or 12" aerial movement rate, at the DM's option. A mother with young on her back (see text and note 6 below) is penalized even further, dropping down one more flight class and another 4" in movement rate, compared to what she would be if she were not so encumbered.

2. Diseases contracted from stirges will almost always affect the "blood/blood-forming organs" of the body (see DMG), and be of the *acute* type. There is a 5% chance for any adult stirge to transmit a disease to its victim on a successful hit.

3. Stirges can always regenerate lost body parts (over a period of 1-3 months) or heal even the most severe wounds (replacing up to 4 lost hit points every 24 hours), so long as their heads and spines remain relatively undamaged, and food — i.e., fresh blood — is plentiful.

4. Stirge claws resemble the better types of fish-hooks, in that they are both hooked and barbed, curving to a point, which has a side-fin or point projecting backward from its tip toward its shaft, in the same way that the edges of an arrowhead form two points facing back toward the flight-feathers. In a live (un-stiffened) stirge, these barbs are not rigid, but can be retracted into the claw by means of strong cartilage-and-muscle linkages — thus, a stirge can hook itself into a victim through gaps in metal armor or by

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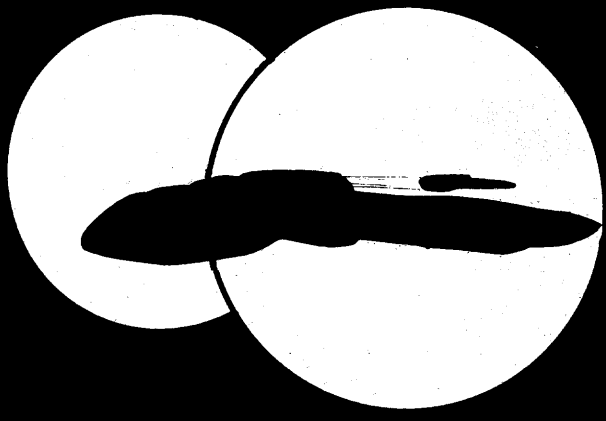

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simply piercing leather or lighter clothing, so that it cannot be torn free except by also tearing away parts of its victim's flesh (1-2 points of damage per claw torn out, 4 claws per stirge). In determining whether or not a stirge's attack is successful, consider a missed "to hit" roll as indicating that the creature's claws failed to latch on to the intended victim or victim's clothing/armor. If a stirge hits successfully, it has grabbed on with its claws and struck with its proboscis in the same round; generally, a stirge's proboscis can strike into or through any surface on a victim that its claws can attach to. Immediately after death, a stirge's muscles relax, and it ceases both to drain further blood and to hold its barbs in — but if it is not removed from its victim within 4-6 turns, and is allowed to stiffen while attached, the barbs will have been extended again as the stirge's muscles convulse, and the body of the stirge will then *have* to be torn free of its victim, doing damage as specified above. If it is attached to armor, but not flesh, then the creature will be easily shaken or pulled loose by normal movement when its muscles are relaxed.

5. As many as six stirges can comfortably (for the stirges, that is) attach themselves to the body of one man or other M-sized creature at the same time. Sometimes more than six will do so, but usually only if the entire swarm is very thirsty, if the victim is a solitary creature, and if the victim has enough blood (i.e., hit points) so that each of the attackers can drain at least a little blood. A charitable DM might rule that each stirge after the third one attacking a single target does so at a cumulative -1 "to hit" (-2 for the fifth, -3 for the sixth, etc.), because the target is, in effect, smaller since other stirges are already attached.

Stirges will attack the trunk of a victim's body in preference to the extremities, since the target area is larger, and those who sink their claws into a victim's back will be virtually immune to counterattack by the victim himself. A companion can try to attack the stirges on a victim's body, but if he misses such an attack and rolls 4 or more under the number needed "to hit," he hits the victim instead of the stirge, and the weapon strike will do half normal damage (round down) to the victim. The first successful attack by a stirge will be upon a victim's back 66% of the time (4 in 6 chance), or else on the front of the torso. If the first attack hits the front, the second successful attack will always be on the back. After that, other stirges will attach themselves to the extremities — but must always hit the victim's original armor class (not AC 10, even if the arm or leg being hit is unprotected). This "hit location" determination is useful in knowing whether a stirge's claws are embedded in armor or flesh.

A stirge filled with its quota of blood can subsist on that nourishment for as long as 72 hours, and can go another 24 hours without food after that before starving to death. However, stirges will instinctively seek out new prey starting 36 hours after their last "full meal," at which time they will have digested half of their full capacity.

6. Although a litter of young stirges (stirgelings) can number as many as three, a mother can only carry two offspring on her back while they mature. The other one must survive on its own, or perish; other stirges will not transport the young in place of the mother. For every eight stirges encountered in a single group, whether in their lair or otherwise, one of those creatures will be a mother bearing 1 or 2 young on her back. When a mother carrying stirgelings scores a hit on prey, the young on her back can begin attacking on the round following her initial hit. Attacks from young are at -2 "to hit," they do 1 point of initial damage from the proboscis, and drain 1-2 hit points of blood per round on following rounds, becoming sated at 6 hit points' worth. The mother must be detached (killed) to stop the young from draining. If she drains her full quota of blood, she will remove her proboscis but remain attached to the victim until she feels her young also pull free, signaling that they have also drunk their fill. Stirgelings can easily be torn free from their mother's back, and typically have only 1-4 hit points. Stirges who fall from their mother's back without being slain will die unless they can find food (usually by crawling into burrows to attack young woodland animals).

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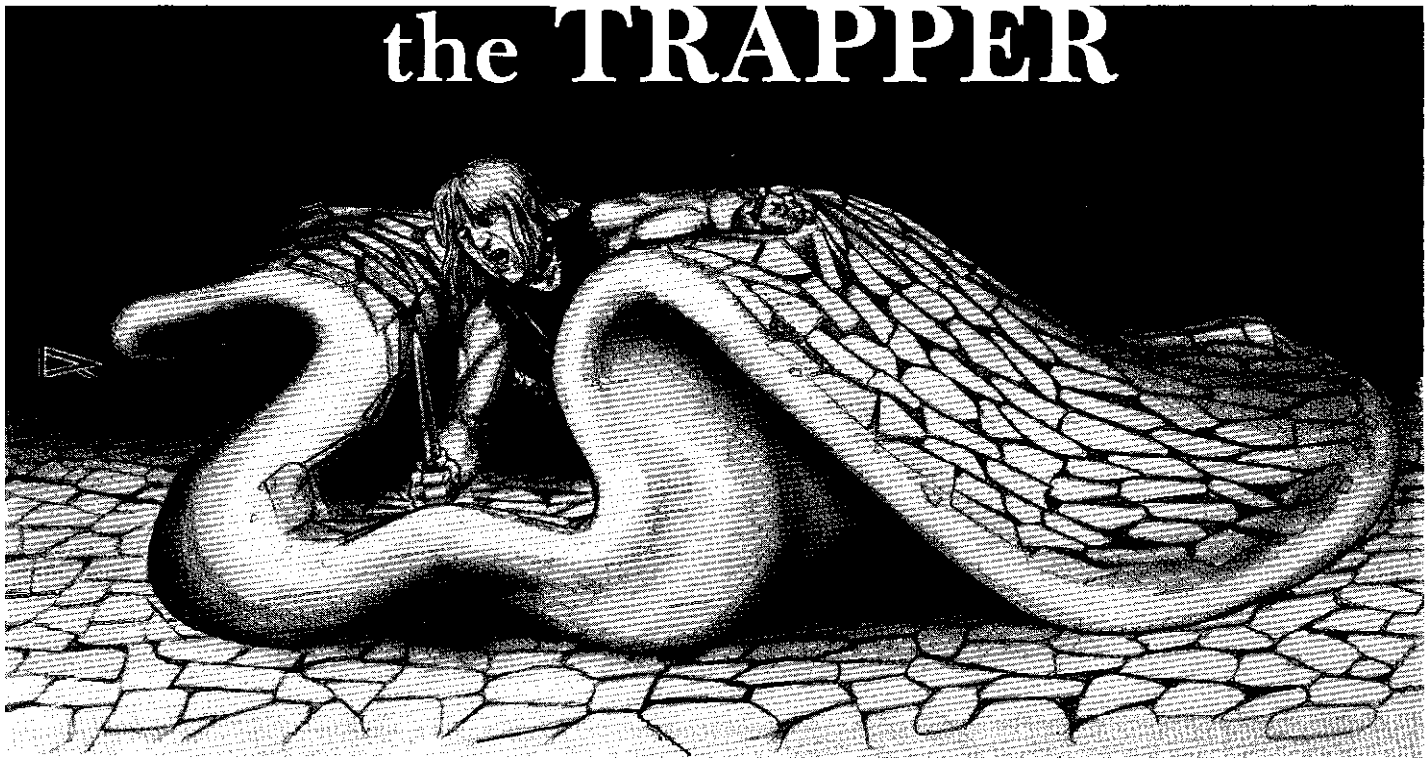
The ecology of the TRAPPER



by Ed Greenwood

"Yes, I can tell ye 'bout the Crushing Death — oh, I may not look like anything much now, boy, but in my day I was a fierce and bold sword-swinger, afore that beholder took off my arm, here . . . oh, yes, big it was, and strong, and we who went up against it just as foolish and headstrong and stuck-up-nosed as you and your friends are now. . . Ah, it's gold ye have fer me? Good, good . . .a respectable sum — and fer that ye'll have a respectable tale. Listen, then — and mind ye, this is as true as I know.

"The Crushing Death in yonder hole is nothing more than a gigantic trapper — yes, I see ye've heard of *that* name. Mind ye, this one is old, and big; it's been there fer twenty winters at least now, to my certain knowledge, and a lot I've seen go and try to kill it — but I've not seen 'em come out again. But never mind that fer now. I must be earnin' me gold, so listen:

"A trapper is a thin, flattish critter, big enough to cover the floor of a good-sized roomy. Its top, the part ye'll see first, looks and feels like stone, as though lots o' flags was laid down, with little ridges and lines just like the real thing.' It's tough an' horny, not real brittle like rock, an' some — dwarves 'n' stonecutters, mostly — can tell it's not stone when they hit it or try to take out a chip.[2]

Under its top layer it's a soft thing, somethin' like a jelly-fish, that can change shape and slide around to fill holes and lay on top o' rough ground, bones or such, so the top of the trapper seems to be flat and level, like the floor — until it's too late.

"Yep, they slide around, and that's how they move from place to place, but ye'll never see one move like that when it knows ye're around — they can feel when ye walk on 'em, but sometimes I think they know when ye're comin', too.[3] Your trapper will lay still, jus' like a part of the floor, mebbe with a special little hump in the middle that looks like a box, or somethin' else it thinks you'd like, and when ye reach fer the box, it'll close up around ye an' squeeze ye jus' like yer hand squeezes a piece o' ripe fruit. So, keep a few staves and bars in hand, or ye'll have no room to use your weapons.[4]

"What's that? . . . Well, I never heard o' someone findin' it in time — it can spread itself out almost as thin as parchment at the edges, so ye can't tell where the trapper stops and the real stone starts, unless ye get down an' take to chippin' an' pryin' at the edges, but then the thing'd jus' roll up around ye, an' it'd be all over . . .

"When it takes victims, the trapper crushes 'em to death, twistin' around so's they can't move an' squeezin' the breath right out of 'em. Then somehow[5] it gets the body an' other stuff from its topside to its underside, an' it eats what it wants an' keeps or leaves the stuff it can't eat. The thing forms its body around the stuff 'neath it, but stays flat an' hard on top, so ye can't tell the stuff is there by lookin' or walkin' across the trapper.[6] If ye think ye're standin' on one, an' it hasn't made a move fer ye yet, stamp down hard an' jump about — the floor won't give, but ye might hear snappin' an' crackin' from underneath if the bones 'n' other stuff give way. Then ye better jump quick, or ye've had it!

"The trapper eats what it catches by oozin' out some kind o' burnin' fluid it makes inside itself, but this fluid only comes from the underside, so's when yer trapped at least ye don't have to worry 'bout that, too. If it gets on top o' ye, alive or dead, the fluid won't hurt right away, but don't let it in yer eyes — it can blind ye fer days if a lot gets in there. Back when I had me two good arms, I pulled a feller out from under the edge of one just in time.' He was wet, but he had his eyes closed from bein' knocked out, and the fluid didn't have time to burn 'im. Don't try to save the stuff if ye manage to get some — when the thing's dead or when the fluid's taken out of it, somethin' goes with it, and no matter how ye mix it, or what ye pay your alchemist, the killer juice is just so much sewer-water.

"I seen somethin' more, too — somethin' ye don't hardly ever see, how a trapper makes little trappers. It don't mate, it just eats an' grows an' eats an' grows till it's too big. Then it splits into a lot of little trappers — I said I seen it, and I seen it, I tell ye! — and they all go off their different ways, to find new huntin' grounds.[8] They kin hide, changin' color to match the ground they're on[9], till they find a good place . . . so, ye won't see one just comin' down the street, but if ye go in there, over yonder, an' poke around a bit inside that cavern, ye might not find the big one ye're lookin' for — but if ye see a little one, be sharp, 'cause there's

bound to be three or four more jus' like it creepin' around hereabouts, an' not a cave or ruined hall'll be safe till they're all dead.

"Good luck to ye all — ye'll be needin' it soon, I think! And if ye do come back, wander in here an' tell these old ears how ye killed it — an' I'll give ye this gold right back as payment for the tale! "[10]

Notes

1. The top surface of a trapper is dense, horny (not brittle), and effectively as hard as stone. It is shaped in irregular, flagstone-like plates or lumps. The trapper absorbs heat and vibration, and thus suffers only half damage, at most, from actual fire; it won't be harmed by normal pressure from being walked upon or prodded, nor does it give appreciably underfoot. It is also resistant (half or no damage) to cold and cold-based attacks; its metabolism does not need a particular body temperature to function, and chilly underground environments are its normal habitat.

2. Small parts of a trapper's rocky surface can be chipped away without the creature being harmed noticeably (no visible wound occurs, just an apparent cavity in the rock); the stony substance grates or rings, like actual rock, when it is struck. Characters who are very familiar with stone (dwarves, gnomes, miners, stonemasons, and sculptors) can usually tell immediately that something is not right when they test the surface — by chipping or striking it, but not merely walking upon it. Characters not familiar with stone may (5% chance) sometimes realize that they have attacked something alive, but trappers are not easy to detect, even when they are being looked for.

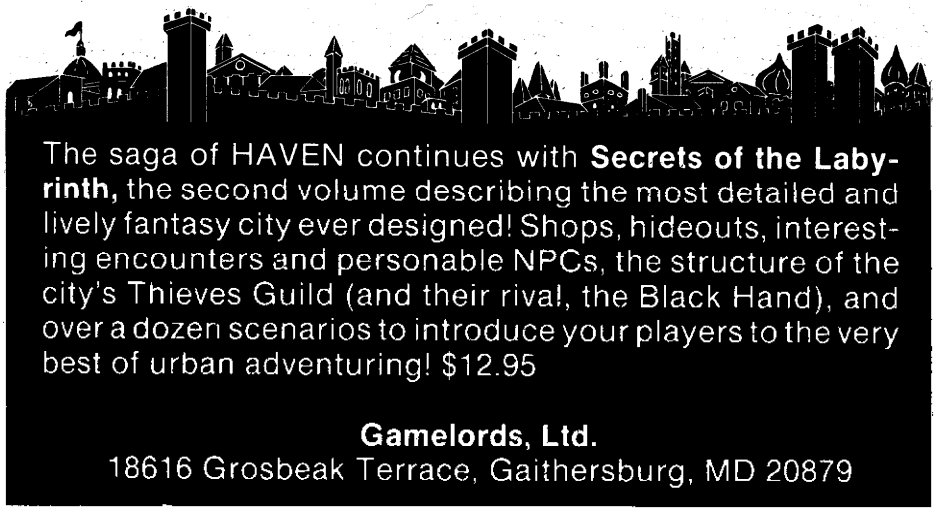
Infravision will clearly detect the underside of a trapper if the creature is viewed from beneath (through a hole, for instance), rolled up around something, or when the underside is revealed around its edges when it moves. (When it is stationary, the hard top surface covers all of the edges.) The heat-absorbing top surface of a trapper is not revealed by infravision; it always matches the temperature of its surroundings, absorbing excess heat (or reflecting most of it, in the case of flame or extreme heat used as an attack form) and simultaneously transferring it, along a one-way path, to the underside. In its reaction to extreme heat or cold, the top layer acts as a barrier and a permeable membrane at the same time.

3. A trapper can sense — and, because of its high intelligence, usually interpret — even the slightest vibrations, such as a mouse running across its surface; the hard top surface transmits these vibrations to sensory organs in the actual body of the creature before the vibrations are dissipated or absorbed. The trapper is apparently not sensitive to sound waves or odors, but it can sense light up to 4" (40 feet) distant. Light-sensitive patches on the top of a trapper report the presence of light to the trapper's brain, which acts in conjunction with these patches to govern the shifts in color that a trapper's body is capable of (see note #9). The patches can detect very small amounts of light — flickering torchlight or narrow lantern beams, for example — in an area that is otherwise dark, but cannot sense the presence or location of prey by this means if the entire vicinity is illuminated, such as in daylight or when a *light* spell is in use. Also, full illumination makes it more difficult for a trapper to quickly shift color without being noticed as it moves onto new surfaces. For these reasons principally, trappers prefer to dwell in dark places, and almost always underground.

4. Iron bars or even stout staves will provide a precious few rounds of "safety" from a trapper's attack, if at least one of them is close at hand so it can be used to obstruct the creature's attempt to close around a victim (as a piece of wood might be jammed into a creature's mouth to keep it from closing its jaws). While this bar or staff is in place, the character(s) it protects can still wield weapons against the trapper. Thrusting and piercing weapons are the most useful in this case, since they are used along the axis described by the bar or staff. Weapons that slash or smash are not as effective (-2 on damage, but a minimum of 1 point of damage per hit) because the wielder doesn't have room to swing the weapon with full force. In some cases, common sense must prevail in determining whether a weapon is wholly or partially effective; long pole arms, for instance, would probably be useless.

A bar or staff used as an obstruction (DM's decision as to what is suitable) will automatically afford one round of safety for the character(s) it is protecting. Thereafter, the object must save vs. crushing blow once per round (as "hard metal" or "thick wood," as appropriate), with a cumulative penalty of -3 per round to the die roll beginning with the second save. Thus, a staff of thick wood will "survive" for as long as five rounds before the pressure of the trapper's muscles on its ends will cause it to snap or slip out of position. (The first round of protection is "free"; thereafter, the staff must make saves of 10, 13, 16, and 19 to remain intact and in place for the next four rounds. On the following round it will need to save with a 22, which is impossible unless the save is made at a bonus.)

5. Apparently our grizzled old adventurer has. never seen exactly what a trapper does with the prey it captures. When a trapper's victim is suffocated, or when the victim takes enough damage to be rendered unconscious or killed, the creature relaxes its hold on the prey and then flexes and moves in such a manner as to slide out from underneath the body. Then the creature reverses direction and moves back on top of the victim, loosely encasing it in the more pliant undersurface of its body. This underside is subject to attack by characters outside the trappper whenever the creature is wrapped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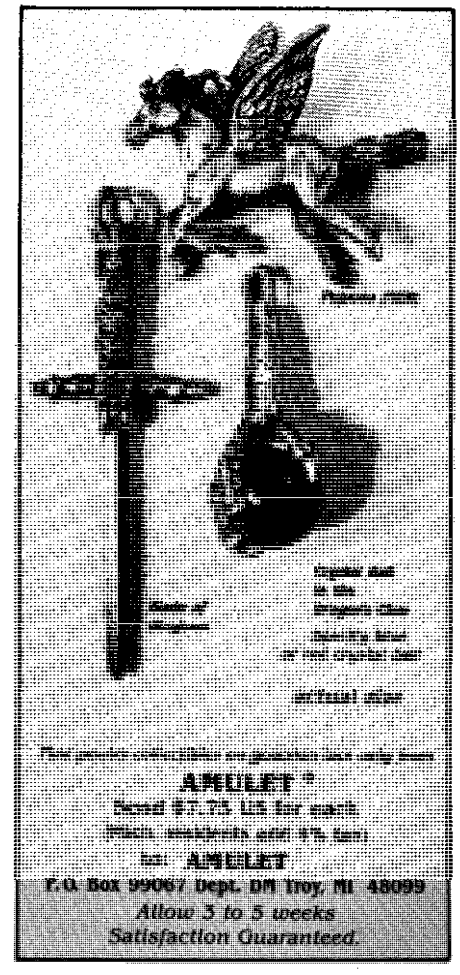


around someone or something. However, the underside is just as hard to damage as the top side; lying just beneath the tough, leathery "skin" covering the underside is a network of strong muscles which, when they are tensed, are just as difficult to penetrate with a weapon (AC 3) as the top side is.

6. When a trapper moves on top of an object, it can use its pliancy and its amorphous nature to "flow" over and around the object, varying the thickness of its body (if desired) to keep the hard top surface even and level. The top surface will not give way under the force of foot-stomping or jumping, but in places where objects lie beneath it and relatively close to the top surface, some of the force of those blows will be transmitted through its body to the objects below, and those objects will crack or shatter if they are fragile enough. As noted by the old adventurer (and the Monster Manual), the trapper can also exercise the ability to form its body into shapes that appear to be lying on its top surface. Sometimes, the creature uses an object it is concealing as a foundation for one of these "sculptures" — for instance, using a broken pillar or a log as the basis for an extension that looks like a stone bench.

7. The trapper consumes its prey by moving on top of a victim (see note #5) and then exuding an acid-like enzyme that breaks down organic matter. The chemical reaction caused by the fluid does not begin until after a victim is exposed to it for five rounds (which is why our hero was able to rescue someone "just in time"); then it begins to burn and corrode, doing 6 points of damage per round to any victim that is not already dead. A single man-sized creature can be entirely consumed in this manner in 2-4 turns; one L-sized creature or a small group of M-sized victims will take 6-9 turns to be consumed.

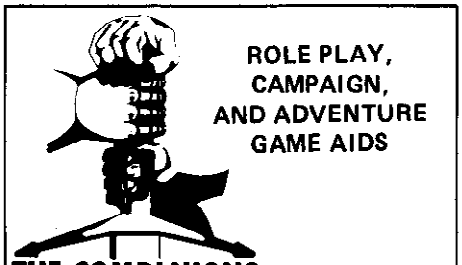
When it "eats," the trapper re-absorbs the digestive enzyme along with the substance it has acted upon, and then the nutrients and the enzyme are separated during its digestive process. The fluid finds its way back into the sacs in which it is contained, until more prey is to be consumed. The enzyme loses its potency within seconds when it is exposed to air, which is why a victim can be rescued without suffering damage from the acid, provided the chemical reaction has not already begun. The enzyme has an immediate effect only if it gets into a victim's eyes, in which case the victim (if he survives) is totally blinded for 1-4 days thereafter; a *cure blindness* or *heal* spell, or similar magic, will offset this effect.

Again, note that a trapper is highly intelligent and will act accordingly — it will not attempt to "eat" anything but motionless (unconscious or dead) victims; it will not try to trap something in its top surface and consume something else beneath it at the same time, because the digestive enzyme loses its "power" when the underside is exposed to the air. The creature is never ravenous (it can survive for days or even weeks without a single "square meal"), but neither is it ever satisfied; as soon as one meal is finished, it is ready and quite able to consume another.

8. The activities of a trapper are controlled through its network of nerves, which gather together into three or more centers or nodes. One of these, the dominant, sentient directive center, is the creature's brain. This brain is highly developed, particularly in mature trappers — able to receive and interpret sensory input, and capable of decision-making. (If a trapper senses the presence of a large party of adventurers, it can and often will choose to lie quietly to avoid the possibility of being slain, rather than attacking.) As a trapper grows larger and older, its secondary nerve centers grow and develop until they also achieve sentience — whereupon the trapper splits into three or more little trappers. These instinctively move away from each other to establish their own territories; one will not knowingly locate next to another trapper. It is not known if trappers fight over territory or prey, but they seem to avoid each other whenever possible.

9. A trapper can alter the color of its top surface (the underside is always a sickly mottled pinkish and greenish-white) by producing pigmented liquid that it stores in bag-like organs within its body and forces by muscular action to and from its "stone" surface. Unlike the digestive enzyme (see note #7), this liquid does not lose its special properties when exposed to the air, so it can be salvaged and used (see note #10). The trapper's natural, unaltered top-side color is that of its underside, only slightly more brown-grey. It can shift hues through browns (sometimes with traces of dark green) to greys, all the way to jet black — but it cannot make its top surface glossy or smooth. It can never be white, translucent, or transparent as a result of pigment shifts. Trappers can exist under water, and are known to lie inches deep in partially flooded rooms or caverns; in such cases, they are virtually impossible to detect.

10. Speaking of gold pieces, adventurers who are victorious over a trapper will be rewarded if they think to recover some of its pigmentation liquid. It will fetch a handsome price (about 6 gp per pint) in quarters where it is known as an ingredient in the making of a *robe of blending*, and as an alternative ingredient in the manufacture of various spell inks (such as that for *Bigby's crushing hand).* Any portion of trapper flesh (the underside) can be used in the making of a *rug of smothering*, *rug of welcome*, or *net of entrapment.* Some magical practitioners have claimed, in writing, that intact trapper brains (preserved in vessels of nutrient liquids) can be linked to doors, pit traps, deadfalls, treasure niches, and the like so as to control their operation, but details of such arrangements and the process of establishing them (if they do indeed exist) are unknown to most magic-users at the present time.



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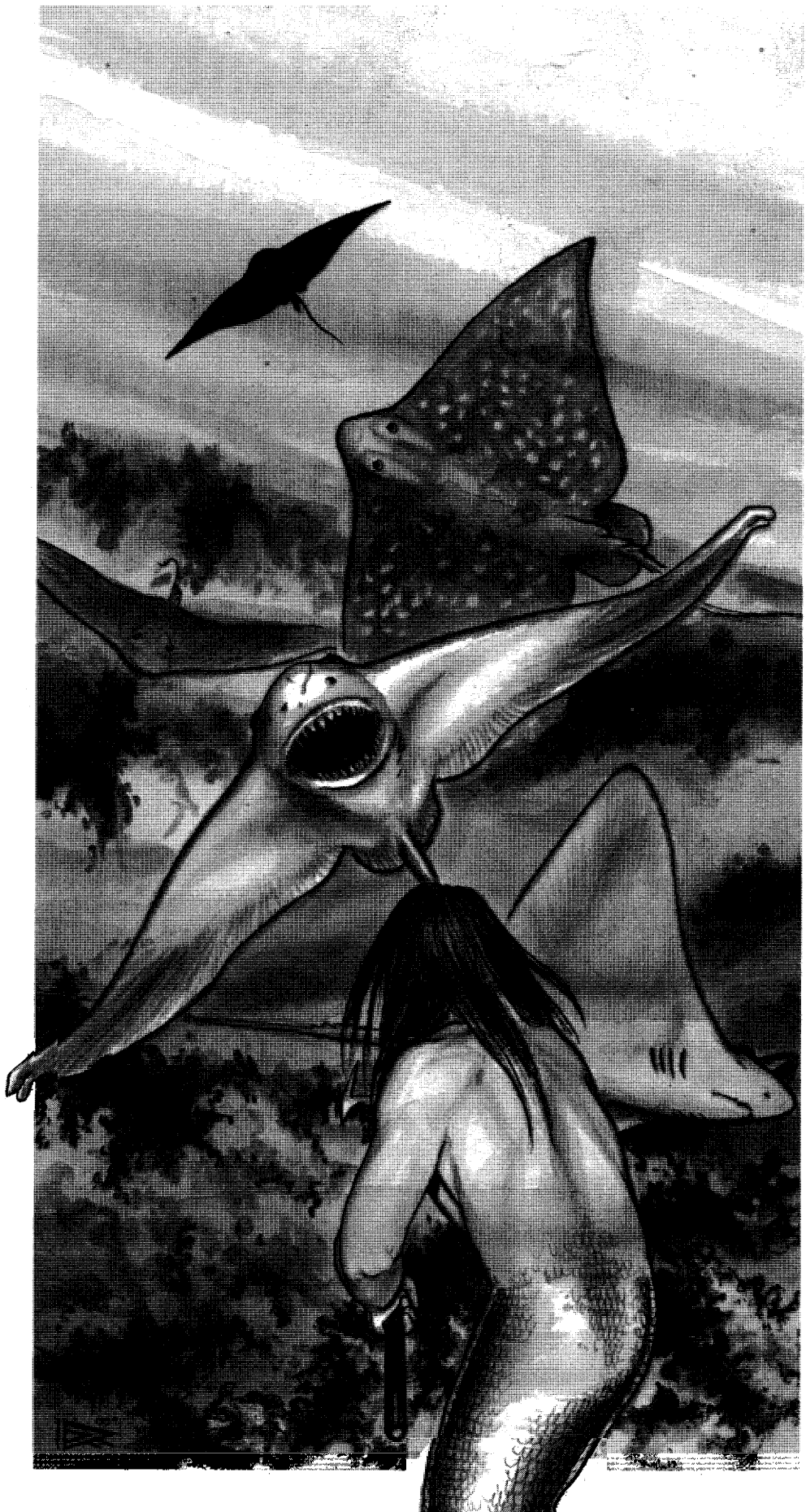
The ecology of the ixitxachitl

by Ed Greenwood



From the *Ramblings, Volume V,* of the sage Nenemith:

A curious creature indeed, the ixitxachitl. Found in colonies of sometimes as many as a hundred or more in shallow, tropical seas, ixitxachitl typically lair in well-concealed grottos or tunnels in the midst of coral reefs. They worship the Prince of Demons, Demogorgon, and from him gain the use of clerical spells, with some creatures rising in ability to the equal of a Patriarch.[1]

Although they are very seldom encountered by humans and humanoids who travel in or on the seas, the ixitxachitl are a numerous race and rule large areas of the coastal salt waters of our world, relying on their aggressive nature and their magical powers to build an undersea empire of sorts.

Ixitxachitl are carnivorous and prey on all marine life that they can kill and devour, this even extending at times (when they attack in huge hunting packs) to giant octopi, whales, and — on at least one documented occasion — a dragon turtle. The creatures range far from their lairs in search of food, and often battle sahuagin, locathah, and especially tritons and mermen. The superior organization and tactics of these opponents have earned them victory over the ixitxachitl often enough to keep these magically endowed rays from destroying all resistance and mastering the oceans. But, at the same time, the ixitxachitl have certainly made their presence felt; in some areas of our world, they have all but eradicated aquatic elves in warm seas, and the tritons have largely found it easier to make their abodes in deeper waters, and only venture in armed bands into shallower areas as a result of ixitxachitl activities therein.

Because of the enmity between Orcus and Demogorgon, intelligent marine undead (lacedons, juju zombies, and so forth) will not aid — and sometimes will actively oppose — the rays. Ixitxachitl, for their part, devour such prey whenever it can be found, and so the undead largely avoid ixitxachitl. Those rays with especially powerful cleric abilities can raise additional "recruits" for their armies[2] by use of the *animate dead* spell, but are unable to Magically control or influence undead because the influence of Orcus against them offers too much resistance.

In battle, ixitxachitl swoop rapidly at opponents from opposing directions and levels, seeking to confuse prey by striking at it from two or more sides at once. In this maneuver, they are often led by any ixitxachitl present of the so-called "vampire" variety, which are envied and personally powerful war leaders and influential individuals in ixitxachitl society.[3] The most

powerfully endowed of the servants of Demogorgon (which are the social leaders of ixitxachitl society) hang back until the single most powerful opponents are identified, whereupon they attack with spells.[4] These powerful spell-users typically swoop together with two or more other ixitxachitl, so that the target will find it difficult to escape their attacks.

Sometimes ixitxachitl burrow into bottom-sand, leaving only their eyes uncovered, to escape dangerous foes; but more often they do this to lie in wait for speedy prey, which they then ambush.

In a manner similar to the way that sharks do, ixitxachitl can sense vibrations for great distances underwater, by means of receptors on their backs and tails — the shock waves of explosions, for instance, they can "hear" from miles away.[5] They have a form of speech by which they can communicate openly with one another, and with some sahuagin that have learned at least the rudiments of their strange tongue, and those ixitxachitl with access to the proper spells can also communicate magically with other creatures. Ixitxachitl have a second form of language that they use among themselves (and with some other marine creatures, such as sahuagin), which is best described as "touch-telepathy." This is a form of limited mental exchange possible only between creatures the ixitxachitl are actually touching, usually with their tails. Groups of ixitxachitl sometimes swim in "stacks," fins beating in unison, one atop another, belly to back. This is believed to be a form of this mental communication (transmitting emotions or general thoughts), and not mating or courting behavior.

The "devil rays" (as they are sometimes mistakenly called) all appear externally identical to other creatures, but ixitxachitl can apparently distinguish sexes and individuals readily at a distance. Each creature mates once a year, at varying times (there are no "seasons" as we know them beneath the surface of the tropical seas). The process is initiated by a female, which chooses — sometimes aggressively — a male partner. By this method, some sages argue, the females deliberately attempt to breed to improve the race.[6]

Certain ixitxachitl continue to grow in strength and power upon becoming adults. It is from this group that a colony's leaders and decision-makers come — but only those that are accepted by their fellows are allowed to live long enough to attain this status. Potential leaders that are deemed unsatisfactory, by whatever standards the ixitxachitl use (perhaps disrespect or disloyalty for Demogorgon is a factor), are set upon by the group and slain before they have a chance to force themselves into positions of influence and power. This "weeding-out" process that destroys many of these special ixitxachitl helps to explain why the creatures have not risen to a position of absolute domination of the seas. At the same time, this process seems to help insure the unity of purpose that binds the members of an ixitxachitl colony together and keeps them, as a group, strongly loyal to Demogorgon. In fact, it is said (by those who should know) that ixitxachitl as a species are more fervently attached to Demogorgon's wishes and aims than any other species of creature on this plane of existence we occupy.[7]

Vampiric ixitxachitl are more feared by other creatures than even the most powerful of the non-vampiric ixitxachitl leaders, because of their lethal bite which saps a victim's very life force, and because of their ability to heal wounds that they suffer. On very rare occasions, vampiric ixitxachitl become leaders or lieutenants of a colony, and such creatures are said by many to be the most dangerous undersea denizens of their size.[8]

Fiercely independent, ixitxachitl cannot be subdued and will fight to the death if not stunned or otherwise immobilized. They are fearless in behavior (but not reckless or imprudent), cunning in battle, and prone to collect treasure of all sorts, to bargain with and in hopes of finding items of magic, which the leaders take possession of. They value most highly those magic items which they can employ; ixitxachitl have been seen wearing rings on their tails and wielding rods, staves, and the like that they hold in their clenched jaws. If they come across items of magic that they cannot themselves use, they will hide them away, to keep them from the grasp of other creatures and possibly to use as a bargaining tool.

Sometimes ixitxachitl will cooperate with other aquatic creatures such as sea hags, or even sahuagin or locathah, for mutual gain, and have been known to hire or train creatures (such as sea lions) to work for them. Sharks can seldom be thus used by their cousins the ixitxachitl, for sahuagin have long employed sharks in their battles against the rays, and sharks seem to have acquired a dislike for the "dark rays" — or perhaps they merely recall ixitxachitl flesh as tasty.

More details of ixitxachitl life are few, not well documented, and understandably difficult to augment, but research on this subject, notably by my esteemed colleagues Ramazith, of Baldur's Gate, and Alauthym, of the Moonshae Isles, continues.

Notes

1. Ixitxachitl gain spell bonuses for wisdom just as clerical spell-casters of other races do, and can use any magic items not specifically prohibited to clerics that can be worn and operated without hands. Most such items either have, or can be modified to operate through, mental commands rather than audible command words. An opponent using *ESP* could learn such commands from the mind of an ixitxachitl while the commands were actually being made, but not at any other time, since the commands would not then be part of the conscious surface thoughts of the creature. Note also that ixitxachitl can employ their clerical spell powers without components of

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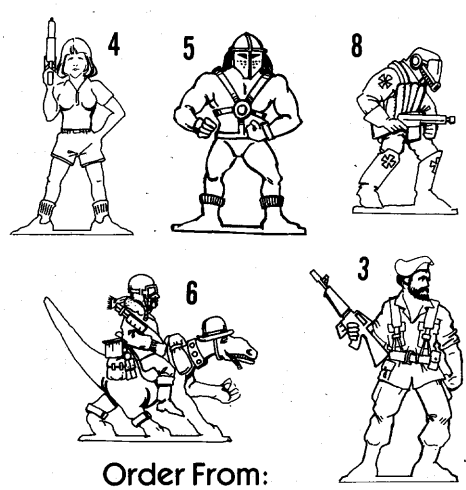

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any sort (although verbal and/or somatic components may well be part of some rituals); these spell powers are considered innate once they are bestowed by Demogorgon, and do not need to be triggered by an external object or force. However, "innate" does not mean unlimited; as with normal clerics, ixitxachitl can use each of their spells no more frequently than once per day.

2. Any ixitxachitl with the spell ability of a 5th-level cleric (or higher) can use *animate dead* and will prefer to do so upon creatures of its own type. Ixitxachitl do not have skeletons like humans, humanoids, and other higher vertebrates do; their "bones" are unconnected pieces of cartilage that cannot be animated like a human skeleton can be. The bodies of dead ixitxachitl can be animated as zombies, however; these creatures have AC 7, MV 6", 2 HD, and the normal 3-12 bite damage. These zombies do not have cleric spell ability and cannot employ magic items or take independent action of any sort; their principal function is to add numbers to an ixitxachitl attacking force. As specified in the *animate dead* spell description, these zombies are subject to the commands of the ixitxachitl that cast the spell — but ixitxachitl do not have any other power over undead of any sort. Ixitxachitl zombies can be turned or destroyed by other clerics as usual, and any cleric attempting to affect them gets a +1 bonus to the die roll for turning.

3. Nenemith refers to them as "so-called" vampires because this variety of ixitxachitl does not have all the attributes commonly associated with vampires; for one thing, vampiric ixitxachitl are obviously not harmed by immersion in running water. Their only similarities to true vampires are the characteristics mentioned in the Monster Manual: level draining and regeneration. They do not assume gaseous (or any other) form, and they do not infect their victims with vampirism. In an environment that is already watery, it is reasonable to assume that they are not affected by holy water, since the holy water cannot be "splashed" on them; if an attacker releases holy water in the vicinity of a vampiric ixitxachitl, the fluid would disperse into the surrounding sea water and be diluted immediately anyway.

4. If an attacking ixitxachitl employs a touch-effect spell (such as *cause light wounds),* the spell will only take effect if a normal bite attack succeeds. If the bite attack does not hit, the *cause wounds* spell (or whatever) is not dissipated and remains "stored up" until a hit is scored. Once an ixitxachitl has decided to use such a spell, its effects will be felt by the first eligible victim; the creature cannot withhold the spell when it does score a hit, with the intent of using it against a different target in a later attack.

5. Ixitxachitl also have 9" infravision and seem to be able to smell other creatures at a distance of 1" or less. They can smell blood, lamp oil, or other foreign substances released into the water at up to 4" distant from the source, depending upon water currents. The normal, color-sensitive vision of an ixitxachitl extends to the limit of comparable (average) humanvision in the same circumstances, being governed by water conditions — in pitch darkness, or the murk of disturbed sediments, visibility can be reduced to zero, and it can range up to half a mile or more in clear, calm water lit by a bright sun.

6. The life cycle of ixitxachitl is still poorly understood, but can be summarized as follows: Six months after mating, a female gives birth to a single young, of 1-1 HD. It is born in full control of its physical faculties (including regeneration, if it is vampiric), but does not acquire spell ability (or level-draining ability, if vampiric) until reaching adult size in 1-3 months thereafter. The speed with which it grows to maturity depends upon available food; a young ixitxachitl in a relatively small colony with an adequate food supply will mature (1+1 or 2+2 HD and full powers) in 1 month. Increases in spell capability and hit dice, for those rare individuals able to attain them, come at the rate of 1 level of spell use every six months and/or 1 hit die every year thereafter, so that it takes an additional three years for a leader type (8th level spell ability, 4+4 HD) to reach full maturity. The

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characteristics that produce vampiric or leader-type ixitxachitl are apparently not hereditary (else there would be a greater abundance of such creatures), but are passed on randomly and infrequently. Most ixitxachitl live for 30 years or so, but some are known to have lived for 10 times that long.

7. All ixitxachitl have an appreciation (partly inborn, partly learned) for their race's allegiance to Demogorgon. Each of them has at least the spell ability of a 1st-level cleric, and they give Demogorgon full credit for endowing them with this special power. Their actions will be governed by Demogorgon's wishes and orders — or what the ixitxachitl believe these to be. They are oblivious to fear (of the non-magical sort) and fanatical, but not personally foolhardy. Those that attain higher levels of spell ability prefer to let lesser ixitxachitl do the dirty work — and perish, should matters come to that — instead of themselves. These special types will always "run away to fight another day" rather than impetuously put their lives on the line, and they often pass grudges on to young members of a colony, so that certain individuals, heraldic devices, and types of creatures will be recognized and attacked with particular savagery, or pursued tirelessly, by encountered ixitxachitl.

8. Whenever a colony of ixitxachitl contains 100 or more individuals, one of them will be a leader type with vampiric powers (8+8 HD, 8th-level cleric spell ability, and usually wearing or possessing at least one type U magic item, as per the Monster Manual). If a colony contains at least 80 individuals, one or two of them will be guard types with vampiric powers (6+6 HD, 6th-level cleric spell ability), but the leader of the group will still be "only" a normal (non-vampiric) ixitxachitl with 4+4 HD and 8th-level spell ability.

Appendix

A. The suggested experience point values for ixitxachitl, as given in Appendix E of the Dungeon Masters Guide, can be amended and expanded as follows if more detail is desired or needed. In these calculations, the use of minor spells (lst, 2nd, or 3rd level cleric ability) and the ability of regeneration are counted as *special abilities.* The use of major spells (5th, 6th, or 8th level cleric ability) and the ability of energy level drain are *exceptional abilities.*

HD	Max. cleric spell ability	XP value
Normal ixitxachitl:		
1+1	1st	28 + 2/hp
1+1	2nd	28 + 2/hp
1+1	3rd	28 + 2/hp
1+1	5th	65 + 2/hp
Leader types:		
3+3	6th	125 + 4/hp
4+4	8th	165 + 5/hp
Vampiric ixitxachitl:		
2+2	1st	105 +3/hp
2+2	2nd	120 + 3/hp
2+2	3rd	120 + 3/hp
2+2	5th	160 + 3/hp
6+6	6th	700 + 8/hp
8+8	8th	1700 + 12/hp

B. As put forth in Note 1 above, ixitxachitl with exceptional wisdom are entitled to bonuses in the number of cleric spells they can acquire and use. Those members of a colony that have high intelligence will possess wisdom scores ranging from 4-16 (DMG, p.79), and any creature with wisdom of 13 or higher will get at least one bonus spell (PH, p. 11). Thus, a leader type with 8th level cleric spell ability and wisdom of 16 would have spells usable amounting to five 1st level, five 2nd level, three 3rd level, and two 4th level spells.

C. As noted in the Monster Manual, ixitxachitl use "evil clerical spells." Following is a suggested list of spells from which to choose, including some which are reversed forms of "good" spells:

1st level	2nd level
1 Cause fear	*Chant*
2 *Cause l. w.*	*Find traps*
3 *Curse*	*Hold person*
4 Darkness	*Silence 15' r.*
5 Detect good	*Speak w/animals*
6 Detect magic	*Spiritual hammer*
7 Prot. from good	
8 Putrefy food & drink	

3rd level	4th level
1 *Animate dead*	*Cause s. w.*
2 *Bestow curse*	*Poison*
3 Cause blindness	*Prot. f. good 10' r.*
4 Cause disease	*Tongues*
5 Continual darkness	
6 Dispel magic	

D. In the vast majority of cases, ixitxachitl make saving throws as clerics. The only exceptions to this are for creatures of 4+4 HD or more, when a save vs. breath weapon is called for — and that doesn't happen very often underwater. In those instances, the creatures save as fighters, since the saving throw vs. that attack form at the level in question is lower for fighters than for clerics. The appropriate saving throws are as follows:

HD	Level for s.t.	Saving throws				
1+1	2nd	10	13	14	16	15
2+2	3rd	10	13	14	16	15
3+3	4th	9	12	13	15	14
4+4	5th	9	12	13	13	14
6+6	8th	7	10	11	12	12
8+8	10th	6	9	10	9	11

E. Ixitxachitl cannot function or survive in a waterless environment. As with other aquatic creatures, they can be effectively kept at bay by an *airy water* spell or similar magic. Except under the conditions outlined on page 75 of the DMG, they cannot hit characters or creatures able to be struck only by magic weapons.

F. The generally accepted pronunciation of the name is "ick- *zit* -sah-chittle."

8

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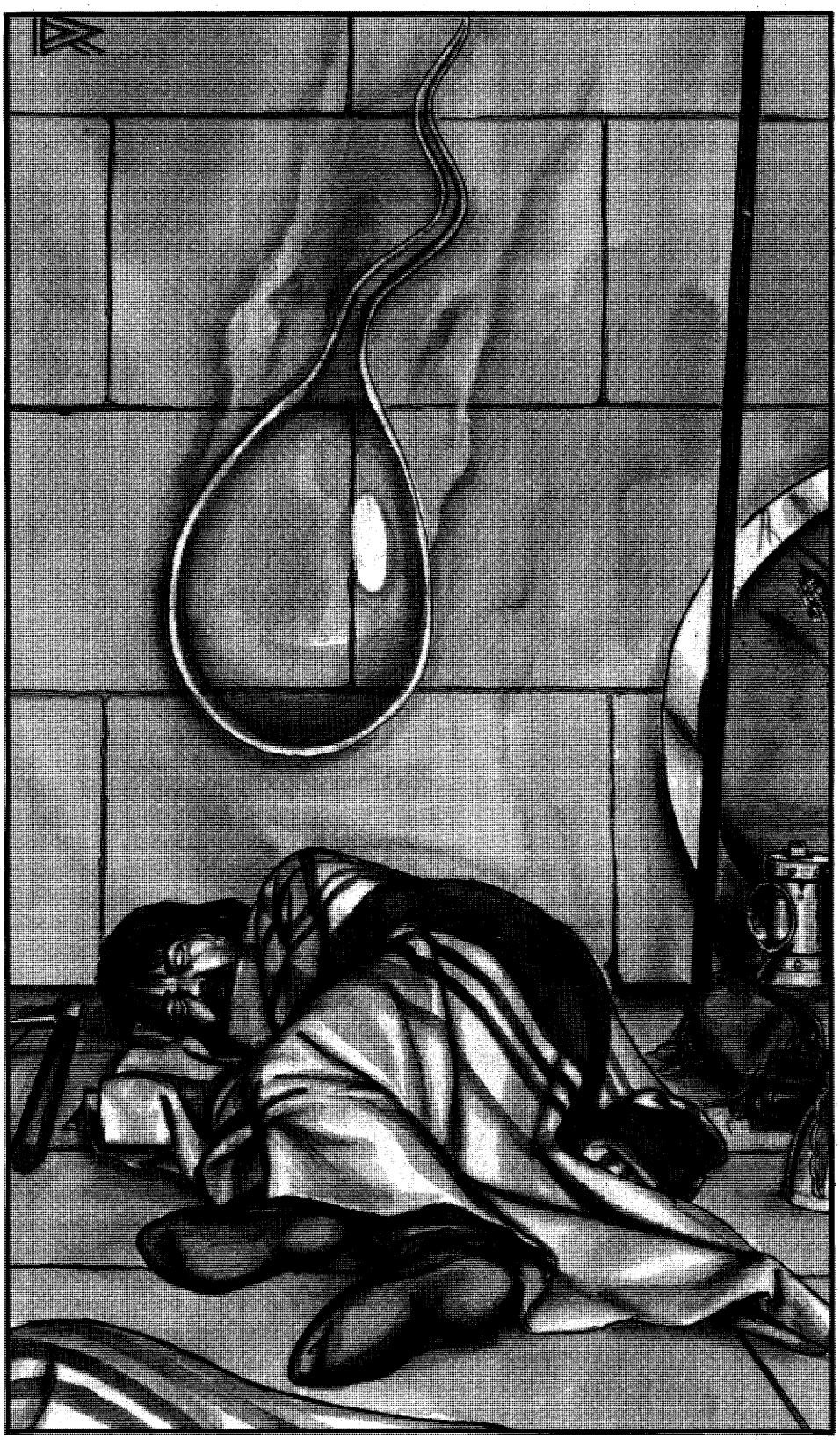
The ecology of the slithering tracker

by Ed Greenwood



From the notes of the wizard Aluthandee:

It is called by such names as "The Invisible Death" or "The Creature That Follows The Doomed," and other fanciful phrases that suggest a thing of claws, fangs, and scaly limbs. When referred to by its mundane name, the Slithering Tracker is not nearly so imposing — and, indeed, it is not a vicious-looking creature, when it can be seen at all.

Close examination of the beast reveals it to be rather like a giant tadpole in appearance. Its transparent, semi-fluid jellylike body is customarily shaped into a blob with a long, sinuous tail. The body is amorphous, enabling it to pass through small gaps and holes, but it prefers to assume its tadpolelike form whenever possible.

Almost invisible and quite intelligent (especially for a slimelike creature), the tracker will lie in wait for prey in an advantageous location, such as in a cozy, apparently safe sleeping cavern, or at the bottom of a pit trap. It can grip and travel upon walls and ceilings and apparently can drop any reasonable distance without harm because of its form. When it moves, a tracker is almost silent except for the faint slither of its tail.[1] The creature exudes a very faint, sweet, "earthy" body smell, detectable only from inches away. The subtlety of its smell, sounds of movement, and appearance are such that it is virtually undetectable in the dimly lit subterranean areas it inhabits.[2]

A tracker feeds by first paralyzing an opponent with a fluid produced by its body cells, forcing this liquid into the victim through the pores of its skin, and then using a second fluid to actually erode the hide or skin of its victim, so that the creature can absorb the plasma from the victim's blood. Both the paralyzing substance and the fluid which effects the draining of the victim are produced automatically within the creature's body from any meal the creature consumes, the remainder of its fare being converted to energy for bodily activity, and sometimes being used to make itself stronger or larger. I know of no alchemists who can duplicate either of the tracker's fluids in the laboratory, but they eagerly make use of the former as an ingredient in the inks for the scribing of the paralyzation, *hold person,* and *slow* spells. Assassins, and alchemists in their employ, prize the skin-eating substance for use in the manufacture of caustic poison mixtures. These substances are present in each and every cell of the creature, and not collected in specific

areas or organs; however, they do readily settle and separate one from the other if a trapper's fluids are collected.

Trackers seem to prefer dwarves, humans, and giants as prey, in that order, over other creatures, presumably because of the physical make-up of their plasma.[3]

A tracker reproduces by budding. When specimens of full size gain further substance, they form excess body cells and place these in a pseudopod. All excess food (unless the parent creature is injured and reabsorbs these needed cells to maintain itself) is converted into more cells for this "bud." Such cells differentiate, and the pseudopod takes on the form of a second, miniature tracker joined to the first. When this is of sufficient size, the tracker produces brain-function cells for it, and these are passed into the "baby," which acquires limited sentience and begins to gain some control over its own form and actions. When it has mastered its form and gained strength, the parent tracker shakes free of it, and, after the initial shock of sudden, total self-control and loneliness, it will go its own way.[4]

Trackers are solitary, never merge with or fight other trackers, and inhabit a specific "territory" or range that they come to know very well, patrolling it regularly and recognizing instantly when some feature of it has changed. The tracker tolerates scavenger creatures who remove the bodies of its victims, but before abandoning a body it attempts to retain loose objects that might be recognized as treasure, so as to lure more prey in the future. A tracker lair is typically a tiny, irregular cavern too small for an attacker to effectively harm its occupant, located at the intersection of beckoning trails of treasure. A tracker can "burrow under" loose objects and carry them along for a distance before depositing them elsewhere, and in certain circumstances might lie dormant with treasure spread on top of itself.

A tracker's brain cells are located in various areas of its amorphous body; it has no special, vulnerable area. It can re-form if its bulk is separated in battle or misadventure, flowing together, or its various pieces attacking in combination, "like fingers of a closing hand," as the fighter Nerouth once put it. Such disembodied pieces will never voluntarily go off to seek their own territories; although they can survive permanently if of sufficient size, they will first seek to re-form once more into the full creature.

A tracker has apparently keen senses,[5] and once tracking intended prey by scent, will leave its territory and travel several miles, by dint of tenacity and perseverance in pursuit. It can think logically enough to deduce the probable destination of a target if the trail is wiped out by running water, heavy rain, or other means, but will not pursue if a large body of water intervenes, or if its quarry takes to the air.

Trackers seem to have a marked aversion to large bodies of water, but why this is so and precisely what effects water may have on them are matters unknown to this chronicler. Some sages (Vaelenbras of Waterdeep, for one) believe that trackers instinctively fear strong currents and coastal tides and breakers, which may have the power to tear apart and forever scatter their jellylike bodies, while others (notably Jarriven of Koss) assert that it is simple prudence: unlike those of the jellyfish, a tracker's fluid defenses may be weakened or dissipated entirely by water, and in such circumstances even small fish could readily devour it. (None of the adventurers I have spoken to will admit to success in neutralizing the creature's paralyzing fluids with water — but then, neither have I ever heard of a tracker being encountered, or attacking an adventurer, when the adventurer was immersed or swimming in water.)

A tracker will move into a heavily populated area if it can find a place for a good lair, where it believes it can remain undetected if it wants to. In pursuit of plentiful prey, it will leave its normal territory without hesitation — but will only do so in pursuit of men or larger creatures, and only out of starvation or desperation, not chasing off after every animal that happens past.

Whether these creatures can hear, and if so, understand speech, is a matter of great and continuing debate among local sages and naturalists. I suspect that they do hear, in a limited way, but no unquestioned proof has been set forth on either side of the debate. Much yet remains to be learned about this creature; my fragmentary researches have led my colleagues to give the creature yet another name — the "Aluthander," after me — and what little I have learned can be set forth on these few pages.

Notes

1. A slithering tracker forms a tail to aid it in rapid movement; the tail propels the creature along with a snakelike gripping and wriggling motion, at a rate of 12" per round. It will also form a tail — or two protrusions, at opposite ends of its body — with which to anchor itself by wrapping around objects, so that it can form a barrier across a hole or a trail to stop and entrap small animals. If it is not employing a tail, a trapper can only "creep" like an ochre jelly, at a rate of 3" per round. It will always form a tail and move faster than 3" per round when it is tracking prey; the tail will "disappear" when the creature attaches itself to a victim, or when the trapper is stationary for longer than one round.

2. Under outdoor conditions, not brilliantly sunlit, there is only a 5% chance of detecting a slithering tracker by normal visual means. This chance increases by 45% when the creature is on clear sand or stone of a solid color under bright sunlight. (Subtract 5% or 10% if the undersurface is mottled in hue or appearance, and further 5% increments as the light grows fainter or more diffused by overhead foliage, and for other conditions that inhibit full normal visibility.) A tracker is thus, at best, only detectable on a 50% chance — under *optimum* conditions — to anyone not having a means of detecting or contacting an animal mentality, or the ability to detect invisible (in this case, transparent) objects or creatures. No tracker will voluntarily put itself in such optimum conditions — few will even venture outdoors at all, if they can help it — and the chance for detection is usually much lower than the optimum 50%. A trapper's body takes on the same temperature as its surroundings; as such, the creature is not detectable by infravision except during one of its attacks, or for a period of one turn (10 minutes) after it has drained plasma from a victim.

3. A tracker requires 6 uninterrupted turns to entirely drain a paralyzed victim. It will not attempt its plasma-drain attack against a conscious target who makes a saving throw vs. paralyzation and is thus still mobile; in fact, it will not attempt to make contact with conscious, mobile targets of halfling-size or larger unless it is starving and desperate. If this happens, a mobile victim can easily and quickly (by pulling, scraping, burning, etc.) break a tracker's draining contact, leaving only a red, tender, non-bleeding area where contact with the tracker has resulted in the loss of skin layers. This reddened area is usually no larger than the circle described by an outstretched hand, and this is roughly the amount of exposed skin that must be available for the tracker to attach itself. The slithering tracker does not wrap itself around a victim, except possibly to curl its body around a patch of exposed skin on an arm, leg, or face; and it does not attach itself along the entire contacting surface of its body, even if a large area of exposed skin (such as a bare torso) is available. This is the main reason why it can be detached with relative ease.

A tracker will always attack sleeping or unconscious targets in preference to other sorts. A victim who is sleeping normally (not under a magical effect) will awaken on

A tracker will move into a heavily populated area if it can find a place for a good lair, where it believes it can remain undetected if it wants to.

the round when the tracker attaches itself, whether or not the victim saves vs. paralyzation. An unconscious victim will not revive as a result of the tracker's attack, unless the victim would have regained consciousness anyway at some point during the 6-turn time span of the plasma drain. A victim who suffers the plasma drain will lose one-sixth of its then-current total of hit points at the end of every full turn following the onset of the attack (round fractions up) — for 5 consecutive turns; assuming the plasma drain continues uninterrupted. At the end of the sixth turn, the victim loses all remaining hit points down to zero. The tracker will detach itself at this point, and if unaided the victim will continue to lose hit points at the rate of 1 per round thereafter until one more turn has passed, at which point the victim (assuming a character or other humanoid) is dead.

The creature can always tell whether or not its paralyzation attack has succeeded, and it will not attempt to begin draining the plasma from an intended victim who makes his saving throw; instead, it will move away as rapidly as possible, trying to get out of range of a sleeping target before it awakens. The save vs. paralyzation — which any intended victim is entitled to — represents the chance that the intended victim has a temporary immunity to the tracker's fluids, because of the target body's present chemical balance, and because of the target's innate resistance to paralyzation attacks; this natural resistance is stronger for those of relatively high levels of experience or large numbers of hit dice. A target that has proven to be immune for the moment will not have to save again during the same engagement, and a tracker (unless desperate) is not foolish enough to attack the same victim twice in rapid succession. But if a target is attacked twice by different trackers, he must save twice to remain unaffected. A second save is required against the same tracker if a target meets the creature more than one day after the initial encounter.

4. "Full size" in this context means a creature with 5 hit dice, or 23+ hit points. A "baby" of 2 hit dice, or 9+ hit points, is of sufficient size to acquire brain cells and limited sentience. The production of a pseudopod and specialized brain cells is instinctive when the creature is under the right conditions — but only a full-sized tracker of 5 HD can reproduce in this fashion. A parent instinctively parts from its pseudopod when the latter achieves 3 hit dice size, or 14+ hit points.

If a tracker is split into two or more smaller portions, its disembodied pieces will seek to re-form if possible, searching around in a small area (about 12" diameter) for their fellows. These disembodied pieces can survive if of 2 hit dice (9+ hit points) or more, but if less than 2 hit dice, they will die in 12-31 (d20 + 11) turns from lack of a sufficent number and balanced order of body cells. Such "doomed" fragments will be ravenously hungry, instinctively seeking sources of plasma, and will attack all likely targets encountered (conscious or not) without caution — for if they absorb enough plasma, they may be able to grow to a stable size and survive.

The tracker cannot make abrupt changes of direction while in motion; to reverse its course it must come to a full stop.

5. Trackers have no eyes as such, but possess an infravisual sense that enables them to locate warm-blooded bodies in a 6" range. They are fairly keen receptors of odor, able to home in on body scents from 12" away with enough accuracy to discern the general direction they must take to keep on tracking their prey. They can sense even faint vibrations up to 16" away, even something as innocuous as the tapping of hard boots (but not soft ones) on a stone floor.

Appendix

A. The standard body size for a slithering tracker is 2½ feet, or (for smaller specimens) roughly ½ foot of length for every hit die. When at rest, the body is in a flattened spherical shape; when in motion, it takes on a teardrop shape, bulkier at the leading edge. The tail which the tracker sends out to aid it in movement is in addition to its body length, tapering away from the direction of movement for a length of 4 or 5 feet in a full-grown specimen. The tracker cannot make abrupt changes of direction while in motion; to reverse its course, or even to make a 90-degree turn, it must come to a full stop for one round and then start off in the new direction. When one is trapped or cornered, it will make the best possible use of its natural defenses (transparency, body flexibility, and near-silent movement) to attempt an escape.

B. Even if a tracker is detected once, that doesn't mean the creature will remain visible indefinitely. It is easier to see when it is moving (add +10% to +20% to the base chance of detection, depending on lighting and terrain), but still may be able to slip away from an attacker. It is very difficult to keep track of a tracker long enough to kill it with normal weapon blows, since several different strikes over a span of several rounds would be needed. One effective tactic is to immobilize the creature with *hold monster* or similar means, then successfully detect it where it lies (if that is not already known) and smash away. Of course, the tracker's natural transparency can be easily offset by dousing it with dye or covering it with soot or dust; this will not suffocate the creature or inhibit its movement, but will certainly make it visible to anyone within sighting range.

C. Two events can cause a tracker to be split apart in battle; in either case, a hit from a slashing weapon (short sword or larger) is required. If an attack roll is one less than the minimum number needed to score a hit, the tracker takes no damage but is split into two creatures of identical size and hit points. Or, if a hit succeeds and does at least 6 points of damage, the creature is split into two equal-sized pieces, each with half of the remaining hit points (assign odd hit points to one half or the other). Example: A tracker of 5 hit dice, with 26 hit points, is cleaved in half by a blow from a longsword that does 8 points of damage. The result is two smaller creatures with 9 hit points each, now effectively 2 HD monsters (figuring 4½ hit points = 1 hit die).

Note that when a tracker is forming a pseudopod, the entire body of the creature may have more hit points (and, effectively, more hit dice) than would otherwise be normally possible. A 5 HD tracker with maximum hit points (40) could form a pseudopod and nurture that tracker-to-be, until the "baby" acquires 14 or more hit points, at which time it will separate from the parent. In the meantime, the reproducing tracker would be treated as a monster of as many as 7 hit dice, with a possible maximum of 53 hit points.

D. A tracker can gain new hit points (or regain lost ones) by draining plasma from a victim, at the rate of 1 hit point per turn of

draining. (The rest of the plasma is simply used to enable the creature to "eat its fill" and maintain normal bodily functions.) Depending on its size (number of hit dice), each tracker has a maximum number of hit points it can attain. This figure is determined by rolling a die or dice every time the tracker qualifies to grow into a larger hit-dice category. The creature can then absorb hit points from its plasma drain until it attains that maximum figure. If a tracker has taken damage, "plasma points" are first applied to bring the creature back up to its maximum number of hit points. When there is no damage to be offset, these points may be used (by a 5 HD creature) to begin or accelerate the formation of a pseudopod, feeding it until it acquires 14 hit points (3 x 4½, rounded up) and thereby qualifies as a 3 HD monster that can live on its own. Hit points that cannot be applied for one of these specific purposes are simply "wasted."

Example: A tracker pseudopod has just reached 14 hit points and separated from its parent. The DM rolls 3d8 to determine the maximum number of hit points this creature can attain as a 3 HD monster; if the result is 14 or less, then the tracker is already at its maximum strength and will never grow any larger. If the dice roll is 15, 16, or 17, then that is the creature's maximum hit-point figure, and it can never be more than a 3 HD monster. If the roll is in the range of 18 to 22, the creature is able to attain that many hit points and, upon doing so, will qualify as a 4 HD monster. Upon reaching 18 or more hit points, the tracker is entitled to another d8 roll for additional hit points, and if the total of all the rolls is 23 or more, the creature will eventually be able to attain status as a full-sized 5 HD monster. Finally, when it gets to 23 hit points, it is entitled to one more d8 roll to determine the absolute maximum number of hit points it can attain. Note, again, that only a 5 HD tracker has the ability to form pseudopods and reproduce.

E. In general, the intensity of a tracker's appetite depends on how many hit points it currently lacks to fill its needs. A wounded creature, despite its condition, will be obsessed with bringing itself back to full strength — and trackers do *not* regain lost hit points by resting. As stated in note 4 above, tracker fragments of less than 2 HD will be ravenous, since they literally need food to have a chance of surviving. A tracker that is not wounded but has not yet attained its maximum potential strength (see the example in the preceding section) will hunger to do so, and will leave its territory in pursuit of prey. A creature currently at its maximum strength will not be eager to take chances, but won't turn away from a meal. In any event, a tracker must consume a full meal (one M-sized creature worth of plasma, or more) once per month, or it will lose hit points at the rate of 1 per day as its body begins to atrophy. And the more hit points it loses, the hungrier it gets. . . . □

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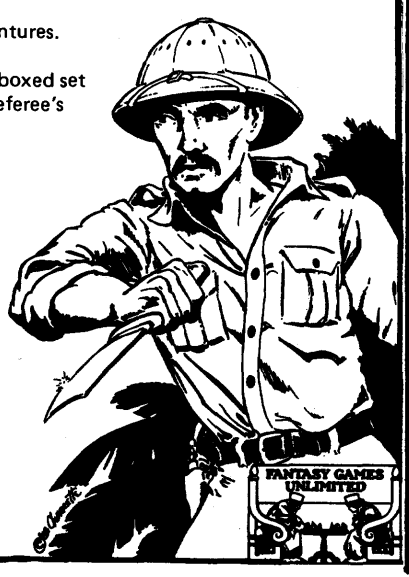

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The ecology of the dryad

Lesson of the day: Don't catch them, they'll catch you

by Shaun Wilson

Though it was mid-autumn, the air was warm on the day of the class picnic. The sun was bright, the sky clear of all but a few clouds, and a breeze gently stirred the grass and fallen leaves. Everyone agreed that the guest of honor had outdone herself with her weather-controlling spell, and Belzime, druidess of the Eastern Wood, received their praise with a satisfied smile.

Old Malec the Sage had suggested to his students that they bring large lunches when they went out to meet the druidess and her companions at the edge of the wood. In this way he assured there would be enough to share with Belzime and her three attendants, an aged elven woman named Hibiscus and two comely young women.

"Now, isn't this better than listening to my dull speeches in some sage's dingy classroom?" Belzime asked the assembled students. A chorus of cheers came in answer.

Only Malec dissented. "My classroom has its attractions," he said after finishing off his slice of roast boar. "At least there we don't have to resort to 'repel insect' spells to keep the ants in their place."

"A useful spell, nonetheless," said Hibiscus. "As a sorceress and a woodland dweller, I can appreciate the value of having a druid around. Are any of your students interested in druidical magic?"

"I think the boys are more interested in your two followers," Malec observed as he regarded his charges from beneath shaggy white eyebrows. Most of the boys were clustered around one of the young women, a flame-haired beauty named Robinia. "At any rate, now that lunch is over with, we should get on with the lecture. Are you ready, my dear?"

"I think so," said Belzime. "The topic I've selected for today concerns one of our lesser-known forest allies and friends, the wood nymph, also called the dryad."

A few of the boys giggled at this announcement. "Apparently," she continued, "some of you are already familiar with the topic. What do you know about dryads?"

After a pause, one of the older students called out from the front of the class. "Dryads look like women with green hair, and they live in trees. I think some of them can talk to plants and some can teleport themselves."

"Not bad," said Belzime. "That generally sums up what most people know of dryads, though some of what you say is not quite correct. Wood nymphs are quite beautiful, as you have probably also heard, and they do have green hair. As for the rest . . . well, I'll start at the beginning.

"Plants, like animals, humans, elves, and such, have a life force that is much like a soul. This force is much fainter in plants than in animals, but some of them still have fairly powerful auras. The most powerful plant auras are found in oak trees, and sensitive humans, particularly druids, can feel the power of their life force from three paces away. This is one reason why we druids consider the oak tree sacred.

"Certain oak trees in ages past were invested with a special gift, and could form their tree-souls into animate shapes. The dryad is a permanent physical form of an oak tree's soul, and is only found around huge and old oaks of at least fifty years age. The tree must be large enough to have a powerful soul, to support the dryad who will live with it and within it. In some sense you could call the dryad a parasite, but that is not a flattering term and isn't very accurate as well.

"Being an extension of the oak tree's soul, a dryad cannot live if her tree dies or if she

is taken too far from the tree itself. Most dryads will never stray more than a thousand feet from her tree in any direction. They call this area in which they live a ***terel.***

"You may be surprised to know that dryads do not need to eat, though they can consume the same foods that you and I do. They like the taste of nuts and berries, and may dig up certain edible roots as spices or foods. In the wintertime, when most plants become dormant and grow more slowly, the oak tree's life force becomes weaker. Sometimes a dryad must then eat more foods in order to sustain herself, and many store away foods that they gather during the fall for this purpose. It is rare that anyone will see a dryad in winter; like the trees, they also "sleep" for long periods of time to conserve their energy.

"Because of her ties with the oak tree's soul, a dryad gains certain special abilities. She can communicate with all forms of plant life, and especially well with the ancient treants. Since most plants are passive and unintelligent, they will obey anyone they understand. A dryad can cause plants to reach out and entangle pursuers, act as spies to report if anyone has passed by, cause vines to trip people, and so on. So close is the link between dryads and plants that most of them name themselves after trees in their woods, yielding some lovely names indeed.

"As an extension of a tree's soul, a dryad can also merge with her parent tree at will. Many people believe that dryads have built homes inside their trees, and have such furnishings as tables, chairs, beds, and chests full of gold. Nothing could be more wrong; the tiny pile of coins and gems that fascinate the wood nymphs are usually hidden in a hollow of her tree or are buried among its roots. The dryad herself lives *within* the tree, merging fully with its soul and becoming intangible."

"If I may, Belzime," interrupted Hibiscus, "it should be said that the dryad can merge with other trees as well, though she will not remain long within them. If she feels threatened she can cause herself to become fully immaterial and she will be transported instantly to the oak that is her home, merging at once with the tree's soul."

"It is possible that some of you have heard of another power dryads have," Belzime continued. "Dryads like handsome young male humans and elves, and sometimes want to keep them — the same way they keep minor treasures. The dryad can cast a spell that enhances her beauty to a man, enthralling him and enabling her to command the fellow by her thoughts alone. A number of my male druidic students have described this effect to me after being rescued from well-meaning dryads who were taken by their looks." Belzime smiled. "I must be a very familiar face to the dryads of this wood. I've led quite a few rescues."

A dark-haired boy sitting near the druidess spoke up. "Is it hard to get the boys back from the nymphs?"

"Well, it is at first. The young men never want to be rescued. Dryads are especially good at hiding their fellows, and the men are entranced so they will do anything to avoid being rescued. If the dryad wants, she can even cause her fellow to merge with her oak tree's soul by her magic; then it is very hard to bring him home. The dryad who has the lad isn't much help, and will deny having ever seen him. If I come and take the boy away, she will pout and look as if she'd lost a cherished toy. She likes to have the young man cater to her whims and bring her things, and he lives for nothing but the chance to stare blissfully at his 'true love.'

"Sometimes her spell over the young man will wear off, and the dryad will sigh and give the boy something to remember her by — a few coins, a gem or two, something like that. When the fellow reaches home, he usually discovers he's been away for several years."

"Druidess," called another boy. "How do dryads make more dryads?"

Belzime looked questioningly at Malec, who shrugged and said gruffly, "They're old enough to find out. Go ahead and tell them."

"Fine. Well, some of you may have heard about races of creatures that have but one sex. Dryads are one of them, as are sylphs, nymphs, and satyrs. Dryads can have children by human and elven fathers, and if they do then their children will always be dryad girls. Dryads can also have children by satyrs, which as you know are always male. The child of a dryad and a satyr is a dryad girl half the time, a satyr boy the other half. It hardly seems likely that dryads and satyrs descended from a common ancestor, so at best we chalk this all up to the perversity of magic, or the whim of the gods.

"The female child of a dryad," Belzime continued, "will stay with her for about twelve years. If the child is a satyr, the mother will turn the boy over to his father's band for his upbringing. A girl-child will spend the first few years of her life attached to her mother's tree. When the girl comes of age, she will be taken to an oak tree of her own and will become attached to it naturally. The child then becomes a part of that tree's soul, and will live there for the rest of her days. She will rarely see her mother after that, but she will be happy and content with her life."

"Why doesn't she see her mother after that?" a young girl called.

"Oak trees may grow reasonably close together, but dryads by their nature are solitary beings. They are happy by themselves, surrounded by their woods, and they only rarely wish other company. This part of their personality may have developed because oak trees large enough to support dryads are sometimes not easily found. Each dryad's attachment to her own oak tree restricts her travel, too, so each must be satisfied with where she lives — and so she is."

"Um, my pardons," said Belzime's red-haired attendant. Belzime motioned for her to continue. "It is possible for a dryad to leave the *terel* of her oak for a brief period of time, but she will never do so intentionally. To do so brings on *glirgimer,* the wasting away of her soul, and she will wither and die within hours. It is said that powerful magics can separate a dryad from her tree without harm, but" — the girl shivered — "that is a hard thing to imagine!"

One of the more athletic boys in the class, who had listened attentively through the lecture, raised a hand. "Is there some way to get hold of a dryad and not have her charm you?"

The color went out of the red-haired girl's face. "Why?" she asked hotly. "Do you want to catch one for a pet?"

"Robinia . . ." murmured Belzime. "Calm down. Perhaps the young man meant something else." From the tone of the druidess's voice, however, it was obvious that she agreed with her follower's interpretation. She addressed the boy. "To answer your question, no. Unless one uses powerful magical defenses, the charming power of a dryad can overcome almost any man's resistance. And some dryads have kept their men hidden forever.

Many people believe that dryads have built homes inside their trees . . . . Nothing could be more wrong.

"If anyone were to try to lay violent hands upon a dryad, he would find her vanishing before him, on her way back in spirit form to her home tree, where she could alert any of her allies nearby. Mighty treants, remember, care about dryads greatly, and so do satyrs, elves, sprites, and pixies . . . and druids." The emphasis she put on the last word was lost on no one. "It is not a good idea to go hunting dryads for one's own sport," she concluded.

The youth chewed on a blade of grass and considered this. He seemed to lose interest in the remainder of the lecture.

Hibiscus broke the short silence that followed. "This brings up the question of what dryads like to do for fun — without having a fellow around," she said.

"Wood nymphs like their surroundings to be pretty, and themselves as well; they like beauty only for their own sake, not for what others care or think. Dryads will perfume themselves with crushed flower blossoms and style their hair with bits of flowers, leaves, and other woodland growths. Sometimes a dryad will find a way to trade some of her meager treasure for sewn garments, but dryads are just as happy without clothing as they are with it. That's another reason why young men often hunt for them — just to get a peek."

"They'll have to stand in line behind the satyrs," Robinia muttered in the background. Belzime gave her assistant a disapproving glance.

Old Malec stretched himself and stood up from the grass, dusting off his robes. "On that note, I think we should prepare ourselves for the walk home. We still have some things left to see in this forest." A chorus of groans answered him, but he was firm, and the class made ready to depart.

Because dryads are highly intelligent, they don't try to charm morons if they can help it.

"We appreciate your time, Madame Belzime," the sage told her after most of the students had set off for the next stop on their tour. "I think you did a nice job of convincing my boys not to comb your woods for nymphs."

"Don't worry," she said. "It's late enough in the year that they won't find them, or recognize them if they do. Remember what I said about dryads having green hair? That's only true in the spring and summer. It changes color in the fall to gold, red, or reddish brown. In wintertime it turns white."

Malec smiled. "So when the boys go looking for a green-haired girl, they'll only find girls like her." He pointed to Robinia, standing on the edge of the forest talking with Hibiscus.

"How long have you known?" Belzime asked.

"Since I heard her name. Am I correct in recalling that *Robinia pseudoacacia* is a variety of locust tree?"

Appendix

1. A dryad's *terel* cannot be distinguished from any of the terrain surrounding her oak tree; the dryad can roughly pace it out, however, because she becomes increasingly uneasy as she passes from the 33" distance to the 36" radius edge.

2. If a dryad is forcibly taken beyond 36" from her oak, she will rapidly (within five rounds) exhibit symptoms of starvation, depression, and exhaustion, and will die in 6-36 hours if nothing is done. A *heal* spell will negate all the symptoms, but the effect of the spell wears off in four hours, and *glirgimer* sets in again if the dryad is still outside her *terel.* An *exorcism* spell will separate the dryad from the tree's "soul"; in this event, the dryad must find another suitable oak tree within seven days, or the *glirgimer* symptoms begin. A dryad's magic resistance should be checked whenever these or other spells are cast upon her.

3. An average dryad lives for as long as her oak tree does. Damage suffered by the

tree will affect the dryad adversely, perhaps putting her into a temporary coma even if the tree survives the shock. If her tree dies, the dryad will die as well from *glirgimer* unless she is *exorcised* and transported to a new tree.

4. For spell effects, assume a dryad can use the following powers at will: *speak with plants, plant door, commune with nature, detect snares and pits, locate plants, locate animals, entangle,* and *trip* (at the 9th level of druidic ability), and *dimension door* (to anywhere within her *terel).* Some dryads (10%) have the power to use *pass plant* at will instead of the *dimension door* ability, though again it will only function within a dryad's own *terel.*

5. There is a 2% chance of encountering a dryad with a female child under twelve years of age. The child will have reduced statistics for an adult, as determined by the DM. For instance, a young dryad could have 1-4 HP, fight as a creature with less than 1 - 1 HD, and would have none of her "adult" powers except the *speak with plants* ability, performed at 1 1st-level effectiveness. When the child reaches 12 years of age, her mother helps her find a suitable tree, and she takes up residence as a full-fledged dryad with 2 hit dice and all of a dryad's magical abilities. However, it takes time to master those abilities: the effectiveness of a young dryad's magic goes up one level every year (2nd level at age 13, 3rd level at age 14, etc.) until she attains 9th-level effectiveness at age 20.

6. For game purposes, a dryad's *charm* power works much like a powerful version of the druid spell *charm person or mammal.* An intended victim is allowed a saving throw (at -3, as per the Monster Manual) upon first encountering the *charm* power. (Magic resistance, if applicable, is checked before the saving throw.) A failure to save indicates that the *charm* has taken effect; then, on a roll of 1-3 on a d6, the *charm* is permanent. If the *charm* is not permanent, it will last for an indefinite period of time. The victim is allowed subsequent saving throws — each at -3 — at intervals that depend on the victim's intelligence. (See the chart on p. 55 of the Players Handbook.) However, because of the power of the dryad's charm, read the saving-throw chart intervals as years, months, and weeks instead of months, weeks, and days. For instance, a victim with 6 intelligence is allowed a new saving throw every two years; one with 18 intelligence can try to break the *charm* once every two weeks.

From this, it is easy to see why dryads prefer to enchant young (low- to mid-level) men who aren't overly intelligent — the sort who'll be easy to *charm* and easy to keep that way. Elves and half-elves, with their innate resistance to *charm* magic, are rarely the object of a dryad's "affections." She will try to *charm* a character with elven blood only if her life depends on it or if she runs across an elf or half-elf with 18 charisma. Because dryads are highly intelligent, they don't try to *charm* morons if they can help it; a servant of low intelligence would become boring before the influence of the *charm* wore off. But they can't resist trying to *charm* characters with high charisma, whether they're morons or geniuses. If threatened with harm or removal from her *terel,* a dryad will try to *charm* anyone she can.

A dryad can use her *charm* ability three times each day if necessary. She rarely has occasion to use them up since large groups of men don't often travel through her *terel.* Even when her *charm* powers are depleted. she can use her *plant door* and *dimension door* abilities to get home.

7. When a dryad is inside her tree, she can be hurt by any attack form that damages the tree (chopping or burning). But note again that a dryad has quite a few friends in the forest. Anyone who tries to harm her or her tree will have to get in line behind the satyrs, treants, wood elves. pixies, sprites, and druids — and deal with all of them first.

The ecology of the rust monster

by Ed Greenwood

From the *Physiologus Veritas* of the sage Baerdalumi, with notes appended by the author:

The rust monster is a creature of curious, even comical appearance. It waddles with great speed in an ungainly, rocking motion like a raccoon cub, dubbed "gallumphing" by some long-ago observer, and chitters in the fashion of field mice. It is much respected by artisans and fighting-men, however, for its power to cause metal to rust or corrode away by its touch, which corroded metal it then devours and lives on. An example of this respect is the great mercenary general Gulgathas, who has issued standing orders that all smithies in his army's encampments are to be encircled with a bristling row of sloped, fire-hardened stakes, or propped spears, to discourage the attacks of such creatures.

Rust monsters are non-aggressive, but are both curious and utterly fearless — even, it is said, being immune to magical and psionic influence in their single-minded pursuit of metal.[1] They can smell metal from as far away as a man can make out the features of another man, and are known to prefer ferrous metals over non-ferrous sorts.[2] Metal clearly visible to the eyes but beyond smell range is apparently nonexistent to rust monsters, and they climb poorly, so the lofty upper reaches of any pole or tree that can withstand their gallumphing charges is a safe haven against the creatures. They have near-infinite patience and perseverance, however, and have been known to wait at the base of such a nearby trove for a month or more.[3]

Perhaps the best way of battling a rust monster is to crush it in a deadfall, with rolled boulders, or perhaps to trap it in a pit and strike it from above with rocks and clubs. If one must face it in open-field battle, it can often be successfully disabled by first striking at its antennae and then at its legs, possibly enabling one to escape with prized metal (magical weapon, coins, jewelry) intact. Beware its tail — an ankle-high, lashing sweep of this appendage has knocked many a warrior on his rump, and before he can rise the creature has spun about to beat upon his armor with its antennae, and greedily seek out buckles, weapons, flasks, coffers, and even mirrors buried deep in backpacks![4] It has a dexterous, sticky, six-inch-long tongue that it can extend from under its beak to catch up even the smallest flakes of metal or rust.

It is not known what rust monsters originally ate, or why they developed a bony "shell" of armor, an oddly shaped tail, or their strangely specialized antennae, but

since recorded history began these curious beasts have lived in symbiosis with a particular type of bacteria that can apparently coexist with no other species of creature.

These bacteria are found in a rust monster's antennae, stomach, and bloodstream, and have a particular need for metallic ores. They gain energy from the sun (the monster absorbs heat through its body armor and tail), and with this and ingested metallic oxides (more commonly called "rust"), they produce chemical energy (sugar) to power, repair, and nourish for growth both themselves (the bacteria cells) and their host, the rust monster.

The bacteria — a type not yet identified or reproduced by any alchemist — can upon contact with any metal (there are no known exceptions) oxidize the metal,[5] even if it is inside a rust monster. Thus, anything swallowed by a rust monster, touched by its antennae or tongue, or that draws blood from its innards will rust. A weapon that bounces harmlessly off a rust monster's tail, legs, or bony shell will be unaffected, but any metal weapon that pierces its bony shell and wounds the beast will immediately rust and become useless. Hand-held wooden piercing weapons do not have enough strength to penetrate the shell, and can only harm-its eyes and mouth. Wooden clubs are effective weapons against the beast, as are crossbow bolts and arrows.

Rust monsters cannot dig through rock, but can scratch away loose rubble and earth to uncover buried metal (in tombs or caches). They can glean sustenance from all ferrous metallic ores, and often follow the subterranean tunnels of umber hulks, purple worms, and the like, searching for exposed veins of ore in the tunnel walls, or metal treasure in the lairs of various underground creatures. Many an otyugh has dined on a rust monster that tried to root through it to get at treasure lying underneath.

The beasts will often be found exploring mines in search of tools and ironmongery. In one mine north of Mirabar, a standing guard of warriors with wooden weapons is employed to keep lurking rust monsters away from the exposed veins of ore, tools and hoists, and quarried ore. Magic-users are sometimes hired to rid a place of rust monsters by the use of "chain traps." Lengths of old, rusty chain are laid in a large circle in a strategically located cavern or other large area; at the center of the circle sits the magic-user and a few bodyguards with wooden staves. When a rust monster gallumphs up to feast, it ignores the men, the magic-user leisurely throws a fireball at the beast, and its body is rolled aside with the staves. If scavengers (such as hunting dogs or dungeon inhabitants) are not likely to dispose of the remains, the body is painted with a rune or message to warn away other adventurers. Rust monster antennae will continue to rust metal for some time after the creature's death.[6]

Rust monsters wander endlessly in search of food, their bony exterior armor protecting them from most predators. They do not pair for life or choose specific mates, but merely mate with another rust monster when circumstances allow. This prolificacy has kept the curiously unaggressive rust monster from dying out in the face of attacks from humans and natural predators.[7]

Notes

1. A rust monster has only *animal* intelligence, and although it will choose to avoid noise, light, and groups of other living creatures, these cautious habits are swept away when it smells a meal. It will pursue edible metal that it has detected regardless of attacks upon it, potential danger, or attempts to *charm, dominate,* or otherwise control its actions by magical or psionic means. (This includes a *repulsion* spell, but a *push* from a magic-user of sufficiently high level would work. A *gust of wind,* however, will not even slow a hungry, ground-hugging rust monster.) The beast's instinctive hunger for metal is too strong for the monster's dim intellect to even notice any other forces attempting to coerce it. In theory, *charm monster* could affect the beast — but only if it is not commanded to do anything that violates its basic nature. (In other words, any command it is given must directly involve getting something to eat, or the *charm* is liable to be broken.) Psionic *domination* of a rust monster is also possible, but it can be troublesome and expensive to maintain control of the monster while forcing it to act against its nature.

2. The sense of smell of a rust monster is apparently linked to magnetism; it increases in effectiveness as the amount and purity of the metal increases. Thus, traces of metal immersed or suspended in liquid, sand, or some forms of clay would escape the rust monster's attention; but rusty nails or tiny shards of metal from a notched or scratched weapon would not. The beast's acute (effective up to 9" distant) sense of smell is believed to be a result of a strain of bacteria unique to rust monsters, which also lends them their rusting ability. Rust monsters can also smell non-ferrous (non-magnetic) metal, but only at a distance of 2".

3. A rust monster can go for as long as two months between one full meal (a suit of plate mail, or equivalent weight in metal) and the next, if it does not expend much energy in the meantime. The monster will unthinkingly try to wait out a target perched in a tree, but won't wait so long that it starves to death. (The unfortunate figure in the tree will probably fall unconscious and drop out of the tree long before this anyway.)

4. If the die roll for the rust monster's chance to hit is one or two digits lower than the number needed for a successful strike with its antennae, there is a chance that it has knocked over an adversary with its tail. Any humanoid standing to the rear of the monster or on either side of it within 5 feet of its body must roll his dexterity or lower on d20 to avoid being knocked down by a sweep of the tail. The rust monster is +4 to hit in the following round against any single target that was knocked down; a miss indicates that the character managed to scramble to his feet and get out of reach of the antennae in time. No character who is knocked down can attack the rust monster in the following round.

Although [a rust monster] will choose to avoid noise, light, and groups of other living creatures, these cautious habits are swept away when it smells a meal.

5. The bacteria will spread rapidly across the entire surface of any metal object it comes into contact with. A dagger or sword blade or any other relatively small piece of metal will rust completely in 2 segments, and a full suit of plate mail will be corroded within 5 segments after contact. Metal weapons that pierce a rust monster's body will do normal damage on that strike, but will rust immediately afterward. If pulled back from the creature's body and wielded again, the weapon will crumble harmlessly into chunks of rusted metal. The rust monster takes significantly longer to consume the rust — typically 1 round for a buckle, handful of coins, or dagger blade; 2 rounds for a helm; 3 rounds for a shield; 5 rounds for a complete suit of mail; and 6 rounds or longer for horse barding or full coat-of-plate. A rust monster will not stop to eat when it is being attacked, but will begin gobbling its spoils as soon as it perceives that all attacks upon it have ceased.

The DM should judge the effects of a successful rust monster antenna-strike according to the circumstances. If only a certain part of a character's body or weapon is exposed through a doorway or hole, then only that part can be affected. However, the rust does spread across the extent of an entire area of metal; if a character clad in a ring mail jersey strikes at a rust monster through a small opening and his arm is hit by one of the antennae, the *rust* will travel along the jersey and the character will soon lose his shirt. The corrosive action does not "jump" across gaps between two objects or areas of metal. For instance, a character who wears metal leggings and a metal breastplate that aren't in contact with each other will not have all of his armor affected

When forced to fight on open ground, a rust monster will tend to strike at the nearest and largest concentration of ferrous metal.

by the same strike, in the same way that a suit of armor and a helm cannot be rusted at the same time — unless there is a metal-to-metal connection between the armor and the helm.

When forced to fight on open ground, a rust monster will tend to strike at the nearest and largest concentration of ferrous metal, but may not be right on target because of evasive action taken by the target. In such cases, the following table can be used to determine where a rust monster's antenna strike hits:

Dice roll	*Item struck*
01-36	Weapon
37-64	Shield
65-85	Armor
86-95	Helm
96-00	Minor but visible metal object (belt buckle, headband, gauntlet, etc.)

Obviously, the item struck will only be affected if it is being held, carried, or worn by the target, and only if the item is metal. Re-roll if an effect on an absent or non-metallic item is indicated, or simply assign a result if only one of the above items is applicable. The rust monster never fails to rust *something* on a successful hit, as long as the target is wearing or carrying anything metallic in plain view. If the target character or creature has no metal to be rusted, there can't be a successful hit in the first place. Even so, the rust monster will smell metal items in a backpack or belt pouch, and will relentlessly try to get at the metal it cannot see unless and until a better prospect comes along.

Metal gates, statues (even animated, magical ones such as iron golems) and the like can be affected by rust monster antennae strikes. Very large objects may take 1 or 2 rounds before rusting entirely and then collapsing. Magical objects with a "plus" get a straight saving throw, at 10% per "plus," to avoid being rusted, as per the Monster Manual. Large enchanted objects (such as an iron golem) get a saving throw vs. petrification at +1 to avoid the rusting effect. An iron golem striking a rust monster would do 4-40 points of damage, perhaps killing the creature — but if a golem carrying an edged weapon struck the antennae or the body of the rust monster with its blade and not with a crushing blow from its fist (the golem is unintelligent and does not choose its attack mode deliberately), the golem would begin to corrode immediately and would collapse into a mound of rust at the end of the following round. During this second round, it can move only 3" without toppling, and it will do only half damage on any attack.

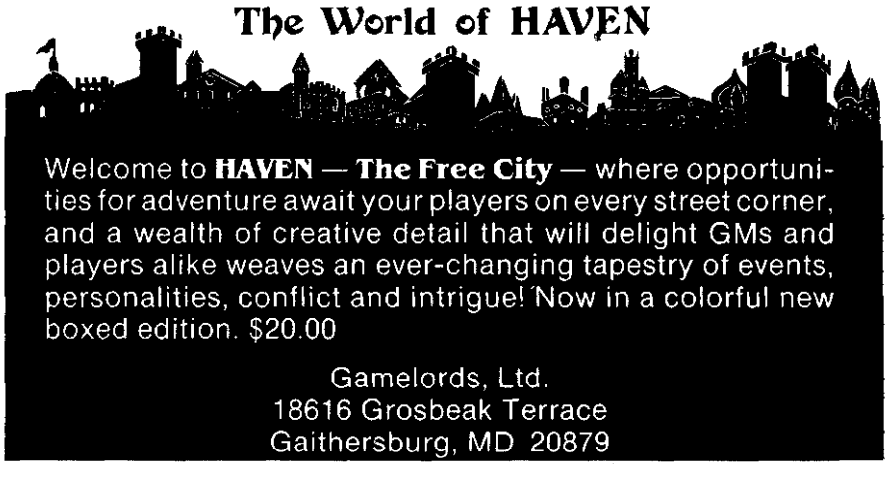
A rust monster antenna will take at least 5 hit points of damage before being severed. Rust monsters are apparently immune to all forms of poison, including the breath weapons of iron golems and those of brass, bronze, silver, green, and gold dragons (who must often fight rust monsters to defend their hoards), and liquid poisons produced by various creatures and by men (and smeared on weapons). Fire does normal damage to a rust monster, but acid rarely seems to have an effect (+3 on saving throw, half damage if save fails, no damage if save succeeds).

6. The bacteria can survive, and continue to act through the antennae, for 6-105 days after the death of the host rust monster, depending on the availability of food. The bacteria can thrive on previously devoured metallic oxides in the stomach and bloodstream of the monster, any metallic weapons left lodged in the monster's body, or newly introduced metal — but the bacteria will die when such supplies are exhausted. A rust monster antenna that was placed in a bowl of water with rust and a lot of metal could continue to thrive indefinitely, and perhaps could even be carried as a weapon for occasions of 5 days or less before the bacteria would need to have their food supply replenished.

A scavenger that devours a rust monster would have any previously devoured metallic treasure still in its body rusted and eaten by the bacteria, but the bacteria could *not* take over the creature so that its attacks would have the ability to rust. Only the creature known as the rust monster (sages have argued over a "proper" name for this beast for decades, but none has gained common acceptance, or seems likely to) can support the mysterious bacteria, and rust monsters do not eat each other. In the example of the scavenger mentioned above, the bacteria would die when its metallic food in the scavenger's stomach was used up, without harming the host, and would be excreted.

7. Rust monsters mate often, following a ritual in which each one of the pair makes agitated chittering noises for several minutes. If one of the adults is fertilized, a young rust monster will begin to form in the body of the parent. It will be born 4-7 months later, live, whole, and active, and will usually accompany its parent until it is full grown.

Newly born rust monsters have all the powers of an adult (there is a transferal of some of the bacteria from parent to child), but have only 1+4 HD and are size S, with a 5-foot-long tail and 3-foot-long antennae. Such a "rusty" will grow rapidly to a young, 3 HD, M-size form, with full adult-size tail (10′) and antennae (7′), usually within 8 months or so, but this growth is dependent on food supply. After a year of life a rust monster is a mature adult and can mate with others of its kind. Ω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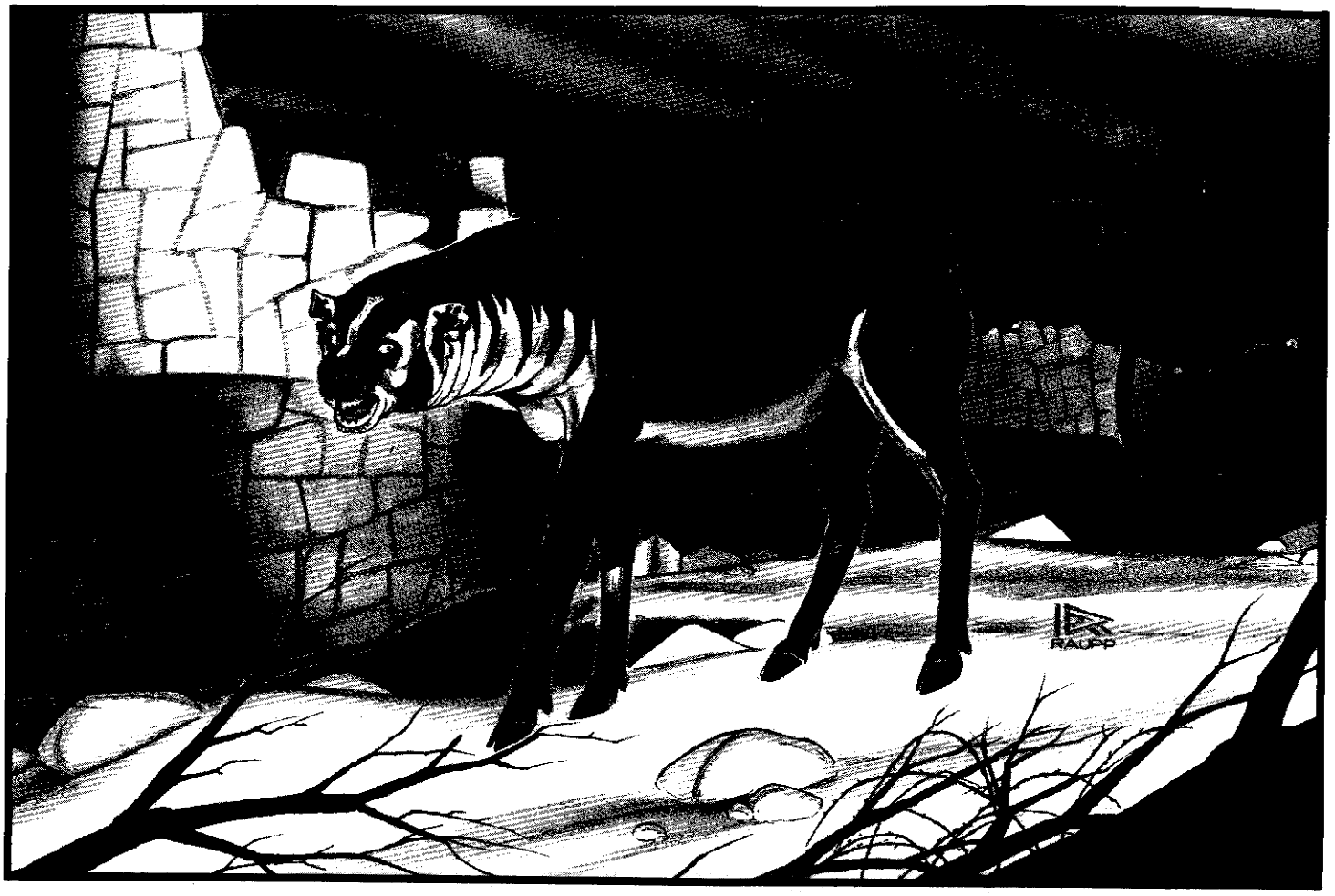

The ecology of the leucrotta

A familiar-sounding but fiendish-looking beast

by Ed Greenwood

From the *Pseudobiblia* of Edygulph Eremmore, naturalist and sage:

One of the ugliest and most cruel of all creatures is the leucrotta, a loathsome carnivorous beast that inhabits wastelands in the wilderness. On its cloven hooves it runs as fast as a medium-sized warhorse, and it savages prey with its jagged, bony jaws rather as sharks do. Humans are its favorite prey, and the "ugly killer" is one of the most dangerous and most feared predators of the wastes because of its cunning and its strange talent for mimicry.

Whether acting individually or in a small group, leucrotta are sly and enterprising. They can develop simple but effective tricks to take advantage of their ability to mimic the human voice, and are often able to lure large groups of travelers to their doom.

One group of leucrotta, for example, came upon and devoured a few pilgrims on the road, took brands from their fire, and carried these for miles along the road to a long-deserted keep, where the creatures lit many torches and brushpiles along the walls to make it appear inhabited. Then, with their human-like speech, they called out (while in seclusion) to a passing caravan, luring the group inside to rest for the night. The leucrotta slew many of the party as the members split up to explore the dimly lit interior of the stronghold, bounding out of the darkness to bite at faces and necks. The monsters returned later to devour the bodies — after harrying the fleeing survivors and chasing them down the road until dawn.

Leucrotta often lurk along roads and near habitations by night, learning information about humans who live in the area or are passing through the wilderness. They take note of expressions often heard in Common Tongue speech, so as to improve their mimicry. One leucrotta ventured abnormally close to civilization and took to prowling a glen where thieves would come to meet in the night. With the vocabulary it overheard there, it was soon able to begin devouring thieves who fell into its trap. The creature returned to the glen every few weeks for several years before it was discovered, trapped, and slain.

Those who, for some reason, must dwell near the known haunts of leucrotta are prepared for a raid at any time, and they quickly learn not to engage in conversation with anyone whose face they cannot see. They begin to expect an assault when their dogs start to disappear; leucrotta hate these noisy, persistent trackers and alarm-raisers.

Leucrotta almost always use concealing darkness or terrain cover to draw near to prey (or to remain concealed while the prey comes closer). Then they rush out with great speed, attacking furiously and tearing with their powerful jaws. They will always disable one victim and turn to another, rather than finishing off one at a time, more out of cruelty than voraciousness. The

creatures are skillful at tracking, and exult in the gaining of food as much as in the devouring of it.

The appearance of the leucrotta is not utterly horrifying, but certainly repulsive, nonetheless. Its bare, ragged-edged jawbones give its face and head a ghoulish, skeletal look. It has the body shape of a large deer, but without even a close-cropped coat of fur or hair; its trunk, legs, and cloven hooves seem mismatched with its head, which resembles that of a giant badger or similar burrowing animal, and its tail, which is thin and slightly tufted at the end like that of a lion. If the creature had a more pleasant demeanor, its appearance might be tolerable or even humorous — but such is not the case.

Leucrotta have been known to cooperate with other creatures, such as lamia or even evil naga, for mutual gain, but most prefer to hunt alone or with two or three others of their own kind. Most other creatures shun them, for even those stronger than a leucrotta can never let their guard down near one of them. Leucrotta will attack anything that is at a disadvantage or that they think they can defeat, whether or not the prey is preferred or even edible. Leucrotta will serve only evil creatures more powerful and vicious than themselves, and then only when promised enough reward. They have been occasionally reported to consort with and aid demons, and at least two observers (the adventurer Ironbars of Elcathra and the wizard Gulgath of Mulmaster), who encountered the demon lord Kostchtchie many years (and planes) apart, reported that the demon was accompanied by two astoundingly large leucrotta of exceptionally vicious temperaments, which apparently serve him as bodyguards.

Although they have no personal use for it, leucrotta will gather treasure to bargain with, or to lure prey into traps with. (Experienced travelers know enough not to hastily approach any hoard found in a cave or grotto in the wilderness, for a leucrotta may be planning to take greedy discoverers from behind while they pore over their riches.) If one of a group of leucrotta is captured or injured in battle, the others will not aid it or attempt to rescue it. On rare occasions leucrotta will team up for a short time (perhaps only one assault) with more powerful creatures of like alignment in a hunting group.

Male and female leucrotta (or "leucrottas"; either term is accepted) tend to be of equal size, and appear identical to casual scrutiny. They do not take permanent mates, and the father does not usually aid in the raising of young. Calves are born six months after mating, live and in full control of themselves. They follow their mother for at least four months, learning trickery and hunting skills, and always go off on their own at the age of eight months, or shortly before the mother is about to give birth again. During the first two months after giving birth, the mother goes into a killing frenzy to provide her offspring with sufficient food. The lifespan of a leucrotta is not known, but is thought to be shorter than that of a human.

Leucrotta tend to wander, following food, and although they like to frequent a "territory" they know well (so as to readily escape pursuit, arrange ambushes, and the like), they do not fight off other predators to defend such an area, and will leave it without hesitation if threatened by very strong foes, lack of food, or natural disaster.

Avoid this creature, travelers and even warriors, unless you are prepared to fight — and do not expect to win. Even some strong bands of men who have gone forth to slay leucrotta have not returned, and most creatures give the "ugly killers" a wide berth whenever possible.

Appendix

1. Leucrotta track as well as rangers do, and try to make this task easier by savaging prey so that it is weakened and slowed, and perhaps leaves a bloody trail when fleeing. In battle leucrotta bite, slash, and tear with their ridged, bony jaws for 3-18 points of damage. They have a chance of disabling or killing prey with a strike to the throat, determined as for the devil dog (see the FIEND FOLIO® Tome): If the leucrotta's modified "to hit" roll is 4 or more greater than the number required, or a natural 20 in any case, the victim has been hit in the throat. Damage from the bite is the normal amount, but the victim is rendered unconscious from the strike. This comatose condition will last for 2-8 turns, and at the end of this time the victim will die if not revived beforehand by the application of *cure serious* wounds or some similarly strong healing magic.

A leucrotta can kick backwards with its rear legs, even when fleeing, and still retain its full movement rate in that round. The hooves each do 1-6 points of damage (roll "to hit" separately for each hoof) to anyone standing directly to the rear of the creature, or anyone in close pursuit of it. If pressed, a leucrotta can rear up and lash out with its front hooves (for 1-6 damage each), but it cannot do this and kick with its rear hooves in the same round. It can combine a bite attack with either kind of hoof kick in the same round, providing that victims are in a position to be hit by both forms of damage.

The monster can stamp on or trample any target that is lower than itself (on lower ground, fallen, crouching, etc.), striking with both sets of hooves together and crashing down with the full weight of its body, for 4-16 points of damage. If this stamping attack hits, all hoof and bite attacks against the fallen victim in subsequent rounds are made at +2 "to hit," unless and until the victim avoids being hit for one round and is able to get to his feet. When engaging a fallen opponent, the leucrotta has a better chance of scoring a hit to the throat (see above) because of the +2 bonus "to hit." If other opponents are nearby, the leucrotta will break off its attack against a fallen foe as soon as it scores a hit to the target's throat or when the victim is reduced to one-third or less of his hit points.

2. Leucrotta have hardy constitutions; the climate of the creature's habitat ranges from subarctic to subtropical. Those encountered in cold regions have a layer of body fat which increases their ability to endure physical attacks; opponents take a -1 penalty to damage inflicted on any successful hit with a non-magical weapon (minimum damage of 1 point per hit). All leucrotta gain a +4 bonus on saving throws vs. disease or poison.

3. All full-grown leucrotta can mimic the human voice with the same degree of skill. Any character within earshot who can understand the common tongue will believe that the voice is that of a human if the character fails to roll less than his intelligence or wisdom (whichever is higher) on d20. Thus, a character with 16 intelligence and 18 wisdom has a 3 in 20 chance of being fooled by the mimicry — on a roll of 18, 19, or 20. A character who is not fooled will recognize the voice as an impersonation, but will not know who or what is doing the mimicry, and may well still decide to approach and investigate. A character who is fooled will not rush forward blindly; he will assume that the voice is that of a human, but may still be cautious about approaching an unseen "person."

4. Young leucrotta are size M and have 3+1 HD when born. They gain 1 hit die every two months thereafter until at full 6+1 HD and size L status at the age of six months. The bite of a young leucrotta (less than six months old) does 2-12 points of damage, and each kicking hoof does 1-4 points of damage. They are able to mimic the human voice at two months of age, and characters receive a +2 bonus on their attempts to "disbelieve" the mimicry. This bonus decreases to +l when the young leucrotta reaches four months of age, and is eliminated altogether at six months of age.

5. If two leucrotta are encountered at once, there is a 50% chance that they are a mated pair (a male accompanying a female who is carrying young). The male will go into a frenzy if either he or the female is attacked, gaining a +2 bonus "to hit" and on damage. If a solitary leucrotta is encountered, there is a 50% chance that it is a single adult of either sex, a 25% chance that it is a female on a hunting spree for her young, and a 25% chance that it is a female accompanied by young (85% chance of one offspring, 15% chance of two) of between 1-8 (d8) months of age.

6. A leucrotta is not overwhelmingly intelligent, but its innate evilness lends it a slyness and cunning not usually found in non-evil creatures of average intelligence. The tricks a leucrotta uses to lure its prey are not overly complex or sophisticated, but are often all the more effective because of their simplicity. One ploy that all leucrotta use from time to time is to imitate the voice of a wounded or diseased character crying out for help — a plea that most good-aligned characters find difficult to ignore.

DUH 'COLOGY OF... DUH ETTIN!

by Ed Greenwood

From the *Trail Notes* of Raujur the Ranger:

Ettins, commonly known as the "two-headed giants," are a brutish, aggressive race of carnivores who dwell in caverns, disused mines, and the like, emerging to raid the upper world only by night. They hunt prey well in darkness[1] and subsist on raw flesh of all sorts; however, only rarely do they fight among themselves, and an ettin will only eat the meat of its own kind if it is badly wounded or sorely in need of nourishment, and no other food supply is readily available. As befits their crude and cruel behavior, ettins will typically hammer their food to a pulp, either with a weapon or by flailing the carcass against rocks, before eating it.

Ettins are largely solitary; they have no particular preference for the company of any other creature type, and the feeling is apparently mutual. A mated pair will typically stay together after mating until the offspring is born and has grown to self-sufficiency. Otherwise, ettins will only seldom gather together and live in small groups, in circumstances where an individual shows itself to be more strong-willed or more intelligent than others of its kind. Members of the leader's group will cooperate with the leader, and among themselves, as long as they perceive some gain from doing so. If the leader of such a band leaves, or is killed or discredited, the group will dissolve and each member will go its own way.

Ettins are generally stupid, but can be cunning in matters of chasing, ambushing, and fighting prey. They are wary of all other creatures — even other ettins — and slow to trust.

One fact known by everyone, of course, is that ettins have two heads. This strange property affords them some obvious benefits in combat situations; fortunately, however, their low intelligence prevents them from taking full advantage of this "blessing." The head on the right-hand side of an ettin's body is always dominant; despite folk tales and ballads to the contrary, an ettin never "argues with itself."[2] Also contrary to certain legends, an ettin cannot regrow a lost head; however, a one-headed ettin is well able to survive its loss and carry on a normal life, albeit without the aforementioned combat advantages and most probably

without receiving any trust or respect from its fellow creatures, who will look upon the one-headed ettin as deformed. The former disadvantage is minimal in most cases, since even a one-headed ettin is a formidable foe in physical combat. The latter disadvantage is not considered important either, because such creatures generally do not solicit or value the trust of their fellows in any event.

Typically, these creatures are not especially fluent in any single language, but use a smattering of words and expressions from whichever tongues are most predominant in their vicinity — usually orcish, goblin, and the common speech. Most of them know at least a little of the chaotic evil dialect, and ettins often consider this their "own" language. In some areas of the world where ettin populations have established themselves and resided for a long time, the creatures have developed a debased dialect of the orcish tongue into a language that can truly be called their own.[3]

A female ettin will bear a single offspring seven months after mating, and such young typically grow to full size in little more than a year.[4] Female ettins are always long-haired, and generally more full-bodied than the males, whose frames are relatively gaunt and wiry except for the exceptionally broad shoulders which are (for two obvious reasons) a hallmark of the species. Neither the male nor the female takes any care over personal appearance, but females like to wear jewelry as a status symbol — perhaps to display their hunting prowess and thereby prove themselves attractive to a prospective mate; females may gain their finery from prey they vanquish, or as gifts from male ettins during the crude courtship ritual they practice.

Aside from the uses described above, ettins keep treasure to bargain with and to purchase the services of others for specific tasks, such as hiring a band of orcs to build a wall or a trap near an ettin lair.

An ettin has pink to brownish flesh, with calloused hands and feet that carry a yellowish tinge. Its complexion often looks darker than it actually is, because the creatures are habitually covered with dirt and filth. The clothing of an ettin, if such a term can be used, comprises nothing more than scraggly, filthy animal-skins. The creatures care nothing for the appearance or odor of such garb, and wear it only for the warmth and comfort it affords them when sleeping on cold, rough stone. Such garments never have sleeves or other accessory parts, for ettins don't want to be hampered in a chase or a battle by mere sleeping-furs.[5]

Ettins have no finesse, or the desire to have any, when it comes to physical combat. They fight with crushing and battering weapons such as spiked clubs and iron bars. They have been known to throw rocks[6] if no other weapon is immediately at hand, and they will not hesitate to rip apart furniture or uproot small trees to fight with. Their outlook on combat is as crude as their tactics; ettins know nothing of honor, fairness, or truces.

But the two-headed ones are not imprudent, and will not take on obviously superior foes if escape is possible. They will bargain with all intelligent prey if they think more food will be gained by doing so — but if the bargaining gets unpleasant or frustrating, they may abruptly decide that a snack in the hand is worth a feast in the bush. At any rate, ettins do not feel bound by agreements reached by bargaining — they seek only to get what they want, and as much of it as possible, while incurring the least risk to themselves.

Ettins worship a deity that is similar, or identical, to the one the hill giants know as Grolantor, though they usually do not call the deity by this name. They view their deity as a gigantic ettin of great intelligence and wisdom (as well as superior fighting prowess) whose two heads enable him to maintain an eternal vigilance against all who would seek to subjugate or destroy the ettins. The similarity of their deities suggests that ettins and hill giants had some common social or cultural aspects at one time, but the two species have no affinity for each other nowadays. It is possible that ettins and hill giants came from the same stock, given their common religious background and their larger-than-human size, but ettins on the average are substantially taller and thinner than hill giants. In facial appearance and body structure, ettins seem more closely related to orcs — yet that species only grows to half the size of ettins. And, of course, neither orcs nor hill giants have two heads; because of this unique anomaly, it is quite likely that the genetic background of the ettin will never be fully known.

As my friend and fellow ranger Athscar puts it: "An ettin is a nasty brute — murderous in a face-to-face fight if one is unlucky, injured, or weighed down, but easy prey to a well-armed band of three or more who keep their wits about them and meet the monster on ground of their choice."

Notes

1. Ettins have keen senses, well adapted to night hunting: infravision out to a 9" range, and a sense of smell sufficiently developed to distinguish animal, unusual, and specific, known-to-be-dangerous scents from those of the surroundings within 3". They dislike sunlight or other strong light (*continual light*, but not a torch or a *light* spell) intensely, but it does not harm them or impair their fighting abilities. The dislike comes from habit and conditioning, and their self-preservation instinct; they inhabit darkened, hidden places because of their solitary nature. They greatly prefer to hunt at night so as to take full advantage of their keen senses, and to reduce the chances that they themselves will be set upon by adventurers or other adversaries. Apparently, the orcish strain in their makeup is not strong enough to require them to fight at a penalty in lighted areas.

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2. The ettin derives some unusual protection from its dual brains. Spells of mental control, such as *sleep*, *fear*, and any *charms* or *hold* spells, will not completely affect an ettin unless two spells of the same type are cast upon it, either simultaneously or one after the other so that both spells are in effect at the same time. Of course, both spells must succeed; for magics of this sort against which a saving throw is allowed, each head is entitled to a save against one of the spells. If one but not both spells succeed, the unaffected head will assume control of the body without pause or internal struggle, and the affected head will be held powerless until it regains its normal state (at the expiration of the spell's duration). If the affected head is the dominant (right-hand) one, it will immediately resume "control" after returning to normal. During this time of powerlessness, the arm closest to the affected head will hang limp and useless; it will not drop anything it is holding, but cannot consciously use or wield such an object and could (under the right circumstances) be easily disarmed or disengaged from the object by the application of some force (a list or weapon blow, for instance) against either the arm or the object.

Note that *repulsion*, *mass charm*, psionic *domination*, and other "group-effect" magics and powers will affect both heads of an ettin upon a single application; if a saving throw is allowed in such a case, the creature is only entitled to one.

If the ettin's dominant head is destroyed or severely damaged in a fight, the creature will be *confused* for 1-6 rounds, after which time the single functioning head will gain control of the "opposite" arm — but that arm will only be capable of wild (empty-handed) flailing until the ettin learns to control both arms with its single head. This process takes 1-2 months to run its full course, after which time control is perfect and both arms can attack normally. Damage figures for both arms (2-16 for the left, 3-18 for the right) will not change, regardless of which head is controlling both of them.

Because of its low intelligence, an ettin saves against all types of *illusions* at -1 — but each head is entitled to a saving throw, and if one or both of them are unaffected by the illusion, the ettin will be enraged at such a trick, not bewildered at its occurrence, and will angrily seek out its perpetrator.

3. Any creature who is conversant in orcish will be able to understand 60% of what is said in this "ettintongue." Ettins often howl and slobber in bestial rage when in pain or frustrated by nimble foes.

4. The offspring of a pair of ettins has no combat ability until it attains six months of age. From that time until it reaches one year old, the young ettin is size M (5′ tall) with 4 HD and does roughly half damage on an attack with either arm — 2-8 (2d4) with the left and 3-8 (ld6+2) with the right. At the age of one year, an ettin is quite able to fend foritself, and will either be abandoned by its parents or simply treated as another member of the group.

5. The skins worn by an ettin are uncured and rotting, and typically carry parasitic diseases; see the DMG under this heading.

6. Rocks thrown by an ettin do 2-12 points of damage per hit, with range figures of 2", 4", and 6"; each arm can throw one rock per round. Note that this is not an ettin's preferred attack mode, and the monster will always use some sort of hand-held weapon if one is available.

7. See the DEITIES & DEMIGODS™ Cyclopedia for details of Grolantor. The deity is usually known by a slightly different name, such as "Grolettinor" or "Grelinor," among the ettins that revere or worship this figure. A very few ettins rise in service to their deity to become 3rd-level shamans; see the DMG. p. 40. for details on what spells are available to them.

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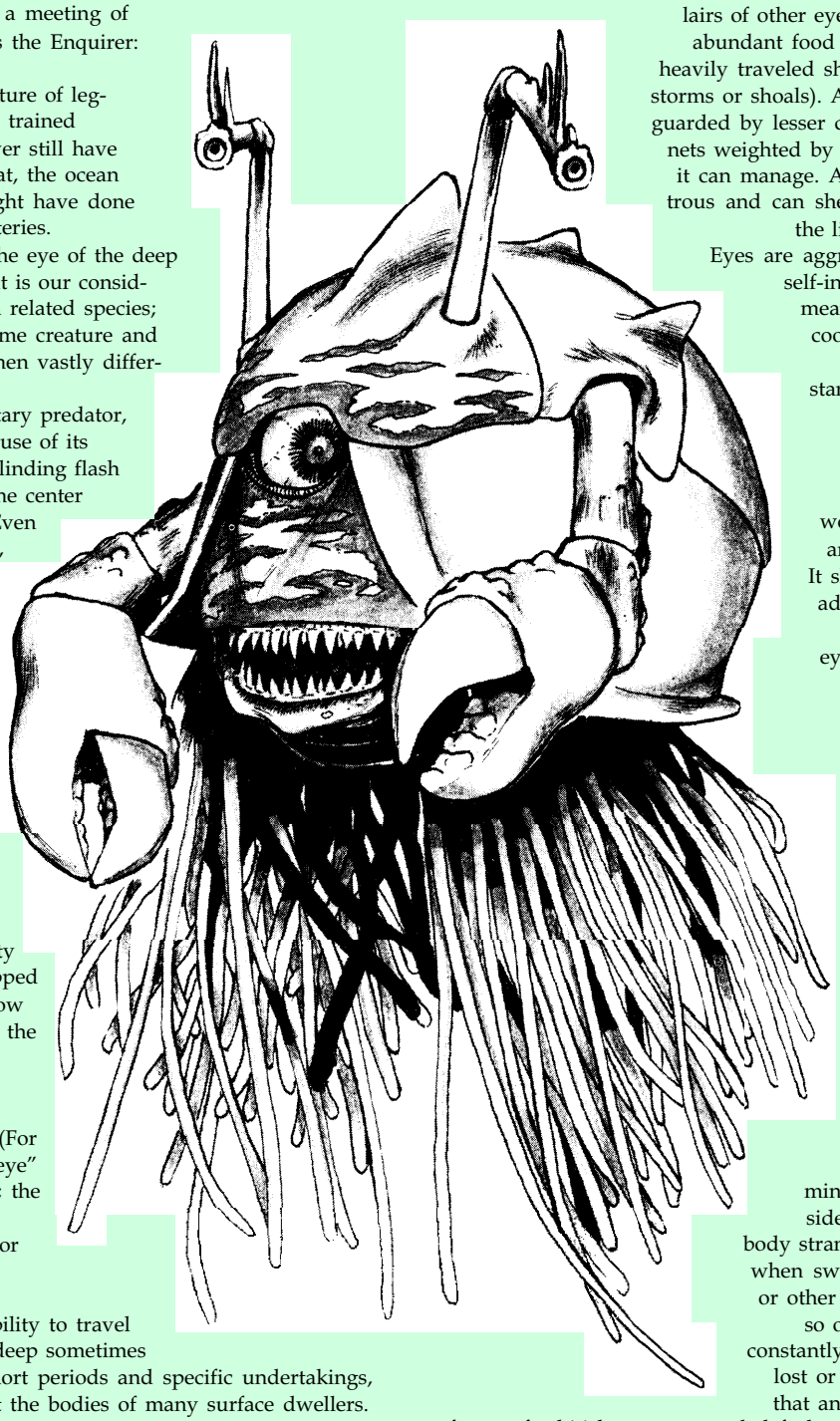
The Ecology of Eye of the deep

by Ed Greenwood

Compiled from a discussion at a meeting of sages in Hillsfar led by Auvras the Enquirer:

The eye of the deep is a creature of legend; though it truly exists, few trained observers have seen it, and fewer still have studied it at length in its habitat, the ocean depths. Several among us tonight have done so, and can answer many mysteries.

Many have speculated that the eye of the deep is related to the beholder, and it is our considered opinion that it is indeed a related species; perhaps both were once the same creature and evolved differently to master then vastly different environments.



The eye of the deep is a solitary predator, catching most of its victims by use of its power to stun its prey with a blinding flash of light from the large eye in the center of its roughly spherical body. Even if prey is not thus immobilized, the eye of the deep can bring its two large pincers into play to grab and rend its victims. [1] These pincers can shred creatures much larger than the "eye" itself, and octopi, giant squids, and the huge cruising fish of the depths form the bulk of the creature's diet. It prizes most highly sinking ships, for it breaks into the disintegrating hulls of these (aided by the intense pressure of deep water), and dines upon the tasty bodies of surface creatures trapped inside. It cannot rise into shallow waters after such prey, because the less intense water pressure at shallow depths causes its body (and internal gases) to expand, and ultimately explode apart. (For this reason, the corpse of an "eye" reaches the surface very rarely; the distorted fragments of its rent body sink back to the bottom, or are devoured by shallow-water marine life.)

To compensate for their inability to travel in shallow waters, eyes of the deep sometimes cooperate with sahuagin for short periods and specific undertakings, usually demanding as payment the bodies of many surface dwellers. (This dietary preference is one of the many hints at a common origin of both the eye of the deep and the beholder.)

Metallic treasure is often ingested by an eye of the deep, but does not harm the creature, and remains in its stomach until it accumulates to uncomfortable proportions, whereupon it is regurgitated forth in the eye's lair. All eyes make themselves a lair in an undersea grotto (slaying any previous occupants, if necessary) far from the lairs of other eyes of the deep and as near to abundant food as possible (such as beneath heavily traveled shipping routes, or in areas of storms or shoals). An eye may well have its lair guarded by lesser creatures, or by traps (falling nets weighted by stones, and so forth) such as it can manage. An eye's claws are quite dextrous and can shear through nets, ropes, and the like with speed and accuracy.

Eyes are aggressive, deceitful, and totally self-interested; "loyalty" has little meaning for them, and they will cooperate with creatures of like alignment only when they stand to gain much prey, or are coerced into doing so. Eyes avoid other eyes purely for reasons of practicality, not desiring to die or be badly wounded in a tough fight with an opponent of equal powers. It should be noted here that the admittedly few observations of such battles indicate that an eye can be affected by another eye's illusions, but each is immune to another's stunning power. Eyestalks can be regenerated in six to eleven days when lost, and other body parts (such as its pincers or central eye) regrown in a matter of months — but the rapidity of such growth depends upon the amount of prey an eye can consume, and a seriously wounded eye is a poor hunter due to its slow natural speed.

Eyes of the deep are highly maneuverable when swimming, due to their many underside "feelers" — flexible, sticky body strands which can act as paddles when swimming, "walk" along rocks or other solid objects, hold prey, and so on. An eye grows new feelers constantly, and feelers are continually lost or damaged by its activities, so that an eye's underside is a tangled forest of whitish, mauve-mottled feelers, all of differing lengths and diameters. Hidden amongst the many feelers are a few "strands" devoted to reproduction — long felers which hold the eye's eggs like peas in a pod. [2] Periodically these egg-holders rupture, depositing their cargoes on the ocean bottom or in the powerful currents of the deeps. Any other eye of the deep can fertilize these eggs; the creatures are bisexual, but cannot fertilize their own eggs. (An eye

will fertilize another eye's eggs instinctively whenever it recognizes the eggs for what they are.

Fertilized eggs fall to the ocean bottom, if they were not there already, and lie there until they hatch or die. Few fertilized eggs survive to see the end of their maturation period, because they are seldom left undisturbed by other denizens of the deep. Fewer still are fertilized in the first place, since they can only be left adrift for two months after being released from the nutrient-rich "strands"; after that time they become inert and infertile. For these reasons, few eyes of the deep are born, and this monster is thankfully very rare.

Hatchlings are rapidly dispersed by ocean currents and typically hide, feeding on bottom life, carrion, and small fish for a year or more, slowly growing to full size and powers. As an eye grows, it actually splits its skin, shedding the tough, chitinous outer armor plates of its body to reveal soft, new, larger plates within. It eats discarded plates to regain lost body minerals and begin building a new layer of plates within itself once more. When an eye reaches physical maturity, its body processes shift to regeneration rather than continual growth. Thus, lost or damaged plates are repaired by the secretion of new material from within. Young eyes cooperate with other creatures more readily than do the more wary older ones. An eye can communicate with all other intelligent creatures by means of telepathy.

Perhaps the most fascinating and dangerous ability of an eye of the deep is its mastery of illusions. These it can create and hold with practiced concentration, for a literally unlimited duration (since eyes never sleep). Such illusions will end when the eye wills it, or when one of its eyestalks is blinded by battle damage or some other mishap (apparently, both must be intact for it to create and focus clear illusions), or when one or both of the eyes is used for its other purpose (the magic of hold person and hold monster spells).

An eye can move its created illusion about, and the image appears three-dimensional. An eye can remain in hiding and manipulate an illusion it cannot see. This skill is assumed to be simply a result of practice; the creatures employ illusions constantly from maturity to death (improving their skill as they age), except for the few times when their eyestalks are incapacitated or otherwise occupied. A typical tactic of the creature is to lure prey to its vicinity with an illusion and then use the light-blast of its large central eye to stun the victim.

Notes

1. Intended victims of the eye-flash stun must save vs. poison to avoid its effects. Targets that are blindfolded, hooded, or unable to see in the visible spectrum cannot be *stunned*. A *darkness* spell will provide an effective screen against such flashes. However, most defenses require more time to put in place than the stunning flash of the eye requires to "fire"; and an eye of the deep will recognize any defensive preparations for what they are. Any physical strike against a creature *stunned* by the eye-flash is made at +4 to hit; the victim cannot attack or defend itself, and AC bonuses for shield or dexterity do not apply. A *stunned* victim is effectively incapacitated for the duration of the effect (2-8 rounds, determined separately for each victim).

The effect of repeated eye-flashes is not cumulative; a stunned victim cannot be "more stunned." The creature can use its *stun* power for as many as five rounds in succession, but then must rest the eye-flash power for an equal number of rounds before it can be used again.

The eye of the deep can use its physical attacks (pincers and teeth) in the same round that it emits an eye-flash. It will go after *stunned* creatures in preference to other nearby prey only if it thinks that the "unstunned" targets (those that made their saving throw) present no immediate threat to itself. The creature will attempt to grab prey with one or both of its pincers and then bring the victim up to its mouth. A bite attack is made at +2 to hit against a victim held by one pincer, or at +4 to hit against a victim held by both pincers — and such a victim can only attack back at a corresponding penalty (-2 or -4). If the creature takes damage in a given melee round, it will release its hold on anything in its pincers; otherwise, prey that is held by both of the pincers will continue to take 2-8 points of damage from each pincer until it dies or the hold is broken. A victim held by only one pincer can (if not *stunned* or otherwise immobilized) wrest itself out of the pincer's grasp and must then be grabbed anew. An eye of the deep will attack prey that is considerably larger than itself (such as a giant squid), but is intelligent enough to only do so when it has an advantage and is not in immediate danger of being severely hurt itself.

2. All of the feelers except for the few reproductive "strands" can be made sticky by the secretion of a gluelike fluid, and made "un-sticky" by the emission of an alcohol-like solvent that counteracts the glue. The former process requires one round and must be performed before the feelers can be used to manipulate objects or provide traction on a solid surface. The latter process takes only one segment and must be performed before the creature can again use the feelers to help it move through the water. The feelers can grab and manipulate any object as large and heavy as a human body, but the creature cannot hold such an object and move under its own power at the same time; as such, the feelers are almost exclusively used either for locomotion, or to anchor the eye of the deep to a solid surface while it awaits the approach of prey.

The reproductive "strands" have none of the properties of the other feelers. They are very few in number (3-6 out of a total of 60-90 feelers) and are continually replaced or regrown like the other feelers. Once every two months, an egg is produced in each strand; when a strand accumulates 6-11 eggs, it splits open lengthwise and deposits the contents into the surrounding water. Each egg is spherical, about 6 inches in diameter, with a tough but flexible shell that enables it to withstand water pressure and moderately hard blows without cracking.

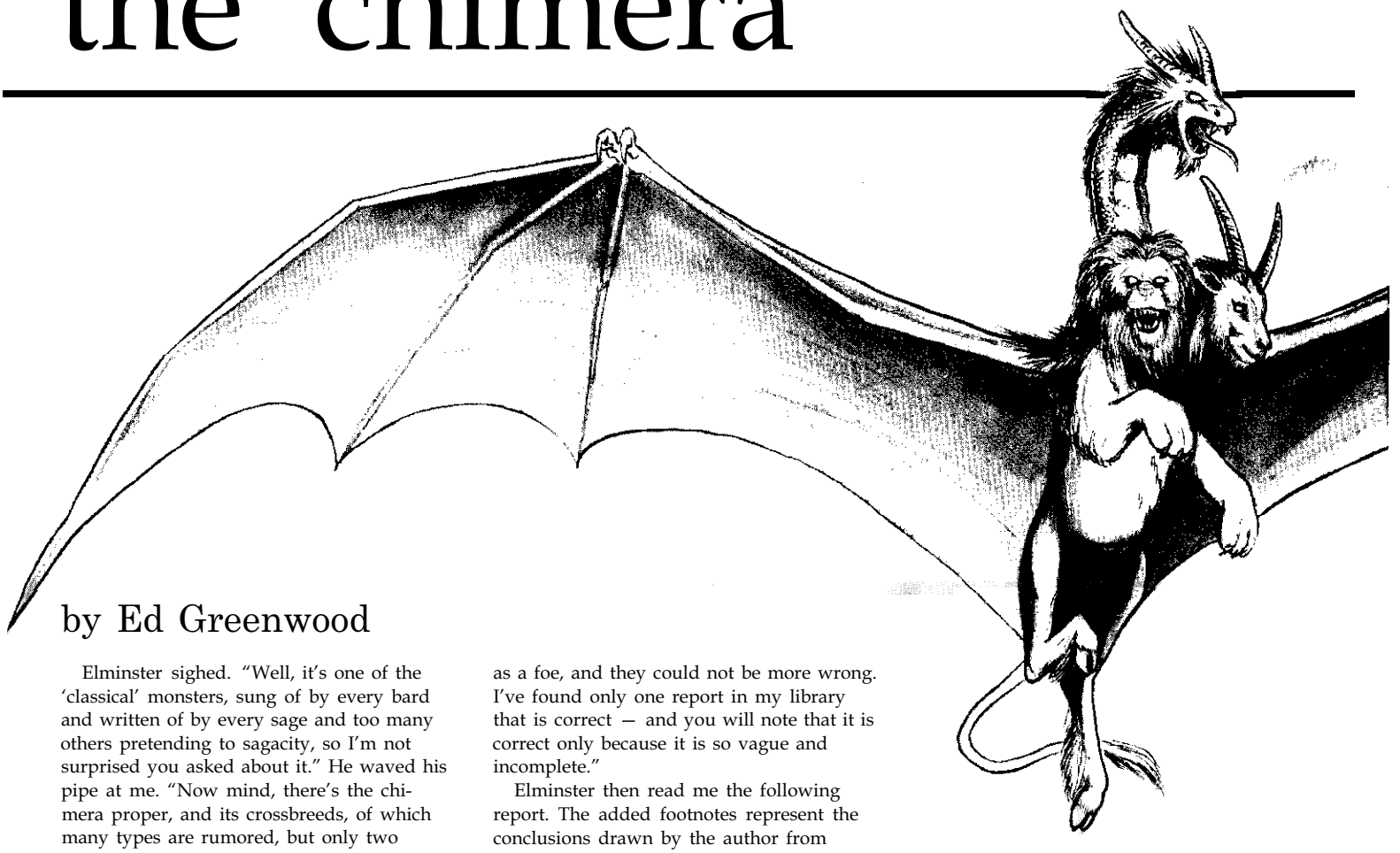
3. Only 50% of all fertilized eggs actually hatch (and only 20% of all eggs released by an eye of the deep are ever fertilized). Hatchlings are weak swimmers (3"), M-sized (2-foot diameter), with 2+4 HD. They have only 11-20 feelers and no strands, and their pincers and teeth are softer and weaker (1-6/1-6/1-4 damage) than those of full-grown eyes of the deep. Their stun attack lasts for only 1-4 rounds, and targets get a +2 bonus to their saving throw to avoid the effect. Young creatures cannot create *illusions* or use the *hold* powers of their still-immature eyestalks. At the age of one year, an eye of the deep specimen will have 8-10 HD, move 4", and the full range of attacks that a mature creature has, with a 3-foot-diameter body and 40-60 feelers, but still no strands. Full physical maturity is attained within 2-3 years after hatching.

4. The *telepathy* ability of an eye of the deep will work on any creature of *animal* intelligence or higher within a 6" range. Eyes of the deep know the tongue of lawful evil, and usually sahuagin, ixitxachitl, common, or (5% chance) some other tongue. Knowledge of these languages is acquired by telepathy; an eye of the deep cannot understand or communicate with a creature that is using a language the eye does not know.

5. The illusionary image created by an eye of the deep is equivalent to a *phantasmal force* with a range of 18" and an area of effect equal to a 6-foot cube or equivalent volume (enough to simulate an M-sized creature or a small school of fish), Any creature of average or higher intelligence that attempts to disbelieve such an illusion obtains a saving throw, and if the save is successful then that creature can add +4 to the saving throws of companions (cf. *phantasmal force*, Players Handbook). An eye of the deep can sense vibrations or unusual currents in the water emanating from as far as 36" away; the creature has infravision out to a range of 12" and can smell blood or sweat in the water from up to 9" away.

The *hold person* and *hold monster* powers of the creature's secondary eyes are treated as spells from a 6th-level magic-user for determination of range and area of effect. Each of the secondary eyes has one of these spell-like powers, i.e., either one cannot use either power. The eye of the deep can employ one or the other of these powers in any given round, but not both in the same round, and can use each power as often as three times per day. Remember that whenever the eye of the deep uses one of its *hold* powers, it cannot *create illusion* at the same time, and any illusion that had existed is dispelled.

The ecology of the chimera



by Ed Greenwood

Elminster sighed. "Well, it's one of the 'classical' monsters, sung of by every bard and written of by every sage and too many others pretending to sagacity, so I'm not surprised you asked about it." He waved his pipe at me. "Now mind, there's the chimera proper, and its crossbreeds, of which many types are rumored, but only two confirmed: the gorgimera and the thessalmera."

"Thessalmera?" I repeated, astonished. "There is such a thing as the offspring of a chimera and a thessalhydra?"

"Aye. And a more ugly, ungainly, and deadly creature you cannot imagine. Thankfully, they cannot breed." The sage sucked on his pipe and considered. "You'll be wanting a story, of course, and all that I can recall are untrue." At my questioning eyebrow he continued: "All of the ballads and folktales concerning chimerae are always either simple, bloody fights with them, and this or that hero prevailing — or they involve heroes and heroines too weak to fight a chimera, who overcame it and slew it, stole from it, or escaped from it by setting its various heads to arguing among themselves.

"This is pure piffle. Chimerae are too stupid to argue. They know only when to attack and eat weak opponents or withdraw when badly hurt. Instinct tells them what is good to eat, what is too hot or too cold for comfort, and when to mate. Most sages think of chimerae as somewhat less cunning than dragons, but otherwise about the same as a foe, and they could not be more wrong. I've found only one report in my library that is correct — and you will note that it is correct only because it is so vague and incomplete."

Elminster then read me the following report. The added footnotes represent the conclusions drawn by the author from Elminster's detailed additions, comments, and explanations, for the study of chimerae was a hobby of his in the days when he worked with the late Laelun of Teshendale.

From the *De Naturis Rerum* ("About the Things of Nature") of Alaphondar, Sage Most Learned of the Royal Court of King Cormyr:

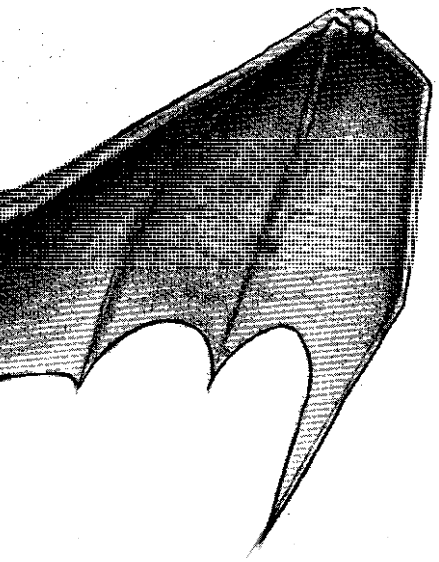
Of the weird and misbegotten creatures of nature, most repellent and infamous to men, one of the most ungainly and terrible is the thankfully rare chimera.

Chimeras (or "chimerae") have three heads: a goat head well equipped for cropping grass and the eating of all manner of rotting vegetables and the like; a lion head admirably suited for battling and devouring game — and a dragon head that can roast flesh and subdue even the strongest prey: man himself. It is an old and cruel joke that the chimera is the only beast that cooks its repast to the desired degree before partaking — old men roasted well done, but young ones only toasted medium rare. Much else is said, often wrongly, about this monster most foul, so herein I do set down the record straight.

A chimera is a stupid beast, but it needs little finesse to survive with the powers it possesses. It seldom cooperates with other creatures, but only rarely does one chimera fight with another. A chimera ranges widely while hunting, trusting to its powers to keep it safe from harm, avoiding only large cities or the lairs of creatures that have bested it before. It is a clumsy flier,[1] able to use its fiery breath, or only one of its heads, or its claws, in aerial combat. It prefers to pounce from flight or high ground onto prey, using its bulk to drive its victim to the ground, where it can rake with its lionlike foreclaws and bite unhampered.[2]

Chimeras are omnivorous, but prefer to dine on raw flesh. They kill their prey themselves, rather than scavenging or hunting with other creatures. They are largely solitary, banding together with others of their own kind only for short periods to undertake specific hunts or to mate. Chimeras take no permanent companions, but often mate with another of their own kind upon first encounter.[3]

These beasts have awesome powers of vitality and regeneration.[4] In a month, one can grow a new head to replace one that is lost or badly damaged. The creature can, of its own will, cut off the blood supply to a damaged head. Then it will ram and rub against rocks to remove the wounded appendage, or sometimes bargain with another creature to devour or remove the useless flesh. If a chimera loses its dragon head, it will hide in its lair until the head grows back and the creature regains its



power to breathe fire (a gas-producing internal organ is involved). This entire process takes between two and three months.

Chimeras speak a grunting, crude form of red dragon language, and sometimes bargain with red dragons for prey and aid, in return for treasure or spell scrolls. A chimera hides such treasure (gained from prey) in its lair, usually under a concealing layer of boulders. Chimera lairs are typically in caverns, disused mines, or ruined castles, particularly if the latter structures rise high to command a view of the surrounding terrain.

The origin of the chimera is unknown; some believe it was human experimentation that initially caused the interbreeding of a red dragon, a lion, and a goat. The truth is lost in the mists of time; it is only certain that chimeras are now a stable, if rare, species, and can breed with their own kind (to produce chimeras), with red dragons (to produce more chimeras), with lions (to produce lions), with gorgons (to produce the sterile gorgimera), or with thessalhydrae (to produce the sterile thessalmera).

Notes

1. A chimera is of maneuverability class E, as are its cousins the gorgimera and thessalmera. The creature's body is very bulky, so even its powerful dragon-wings can do little more than keep the chimera aloft; high speed and abrupt sharp turns are out of the question, which is why the beast only uses flight as a means to gain a positional advantage over a ground-based opponent. A chimera will almost never voluntarily engage in aerial combat with another flying creature, not even one as ungainly as itself.

2. The fiery breath of a chimera does as much as 3-24 points of damage to a target within a 5″ distance from its dragon head, in a cone-shaped area 2″ in diameter at the farthest point. Against a formidable foe, it will use this attack as frequently as possible (as often as once per round, up to 6 times per day). In a less challenging situation, the creature will rely on its claw, hoof, and bite attacks and only use its breath weapon on a 50% chance (roll separately for each round of combat). A target within the area of effect can take only half damage by making a successful saving throw vs. breath weapon.

A chimera's lion head bites for 3-12 points of damage, the slash of its goat head's horns can do 1-2 points of damage if a target presents itself, and its dragon head does 2-8 points of damage on every bite that hits. The lion foreclaws do 1-4 damage each, and the hooves on its rear goat-legs do 1-3 points of damage each from kicking (only possible against targets behind or below the chimera). The creature's tail and wings do no damage, but can buffet, trip, distract, and sometimes even knock over opponents. A chimera is capable of wielding all of its various appendages against separate foes simultaneously. Its scaled, sinuous dragon head is armor class 2, its leathery wings AC 5, and its vast, bulky body (including the lion and goat heads) is AC 6.

A gorgimera's body is entirely AC 2 except for the gorgonlike hindquarters and bull-head, which are AC 5. A thessalmera's body is AC 0, except for the gorgon-head (AC 5) and the wings and dragon-head (both AC 2).

3. The mating of two chimerae will produce offspring only 30% of the time. When it is successful, the mother will give birth to 1-3 small, mewling, helpless young 6-9 months afterward. (The gestation period is longer when multiple births are involved.) For a month after giving birth, the mother hunts for the young, dragging her kills back to the lair, and then leaves them to fend for themselves. By this time the young can breathe fire (3″ range, 2-12 damage, save for half damage, same frequency limits as an adult). A young chimera does 1-6 damage with its lion bite, 1-4 with its dragon bite, and 1 point of damage apiece with any of its claw or hoof attacks. Immature chimeras are size S (2′ at shoulder), can move 9″ on land but only fly at 12″ (for a maximum of 2 rounds at a time before needing to rest for 1 round). They have 3 HD and have AC figures of 8/7/4.

For 3 months after being left alone, the young will hunt together out of mutual necessity. At the end of this time they will have grown to 7 HD and acquired full adult powers, except that they can only breathe fire 4 times per day. At 4 months of age they strike out on their own, and 2 months later they reach full adult size (9 HD) and powers. Thereafter they may slowly gain weight with age and heavy eating. Chimeras sometimes mate with gorgons (see Monster Manual II, "Gorgimera") or thessalhydrae (see below).

THESSALMERA

FREQUENCY: *Very rare*
NO. APPEARING: *1*
ARMOR CLASS: *5/2/0*
MOVE: *12″/18″*
HIT DICE: *10*
% IN LAIR: *40%*
TREASURE TYPE: *All possible, lair only*
NO. OF ATTACKS: *See below*
DAMAGE/ATTACK: *1-6 (x6 to x8)/ 1-12 (tail)/2-8/3-12*
SPECIAL ATTACKS: *Breath weapon; poison*
SPECIAL DEFENSES: *Immune to petrification and acid*
MAGIC RESISTANCE: *Standard*
INTELLIGENCE: *Animal*
ALIGNMENT: *Neutral evil*
SIZE: *L (12′ tall, 20′ long)*
PSIONIC ABILITY: *Nil*
Attack/Defense Modes: *Nil*

The very rare thessalmera lairs in swamps, jungles, or caverns, and can endure extremes of climate with impunity. A sterile crossbreed of thessalhydra and chimera, the cunning thessalmera is often found close to civilization (where it can feed upon isolated bands of travelers or upon livestock, hunting in stealth by night). It preys chiefly on the choicest of red-blooded creatures: man.

The thessalmera has the scaled, lizardlike body and pincer-clawed tail of the thessalhydra, six to eight snakelike heads, a central lion's head, and a red dragonlike head. The dragon head can bite for 2-8 points of damage or (up to 6 times a day) breathe fire in a cone up to 5″ distant, ½″ wide at its jaws and widening to 2″ across at maximum range. This breath weapon does 3-24 points of damage, or half damage if the target makes a save vs. breath weapon (objects save vs. normal fire). The lion jaws bite and rend prey for 3-12 damage. The pincerlike tail does 1-12 damage on a hit, and can grasp one M-sized or smaller opponent, holding that victim immobile (roll less than Str on d20 to escape, one attempt allowed per round). The snakelike heads do 1-6 damage per bite, plus an extra 1-6 on each hit from the creature's acidic venom (unless the victim saves vs. poison). The thessalmera cannot spit its acidic venom like a thessalhydra can.

4. Chimerae, gorgimerae, and thessalmerae can all regenerate 2 hit points of damage every 24 hours, regardless of activities engaged in during that time. They are also all resistant to fire (+3 on saving throws vs. all types of heat and fire) and immune to

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petrification, and the thessalmera (like its thessalhydra parent) is also immune to the effects of any sort of acid. The natural lifespans of these three creatures are unknown, but are thought to be more than 30 years in every case.

A mature chimera has 9 hit dice, distributed as follows: dragon head 2, lion head 2, goat head 1, wings ½ each, and body 3. Its dragon head can swivel 360 degrees about to attack creatures behind, above, or below the chimera, and its long, scaled neck can dart with great speed (in 1 segment) up to 1" outward, or around corners, etc., to breathe fire at opponents. The chimera never falls into a complete, deep sleep; rather, one or two of its heads will nap at one time while the third remains watchful, able to bring the whole beast awake and alert in an instant.

The hit dice of a mature gorgimera are distributed identically to those of a chimera, except that the gorgon head has 2 hit dice, whereas the chimera's goat head has only 1, and the creature sleeps in a like manner.

A thessalmera (see above) has hit dice as follows: dragon head 2, lion head 2, tail 1, body 5. The snakelike heads can be severed by dealing them 12 points of damage each, but harming or severing one or more of them does not diminish the HP total of the rest of the creature. The venom of the thessalmera loses its efficacy upon the death of the creature, and has not yet been successfully duplicated or preserved by alchemists.

Chimerae and gorgimerae are too stupid for their heads to argue among themselves, and are in any case immune to their own breath weapons. A thessalmera is always controlled by its lion head unless it is destroyed or damaged, whereupon the dragon head takes over; if that is also destroyed, a thessalmera will become a semi-intelligent, frenzied killing machine, fearlessly and recklessly attacking all living creatures it can perceive and reach. When all such creatures are slain and eaten, it will seek a lair and remain hidden therein until its lion and dragon heads have regenerated.

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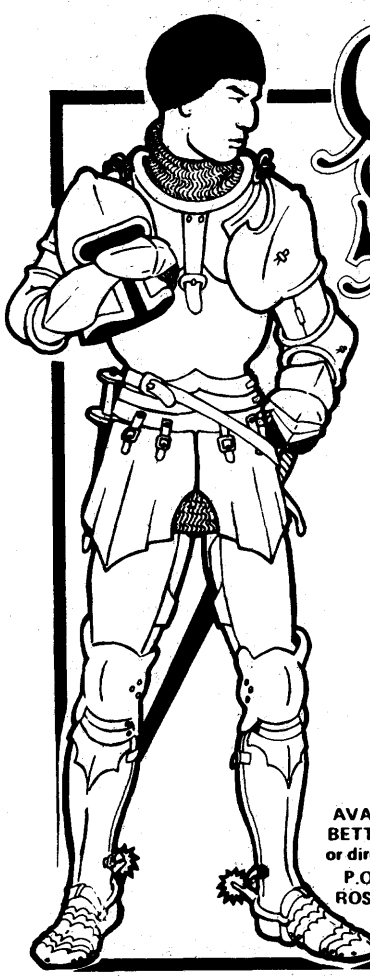

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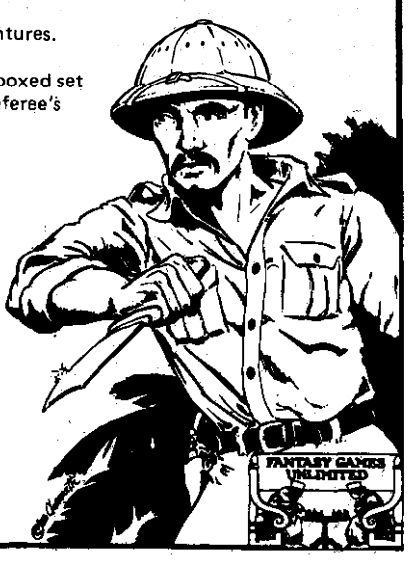

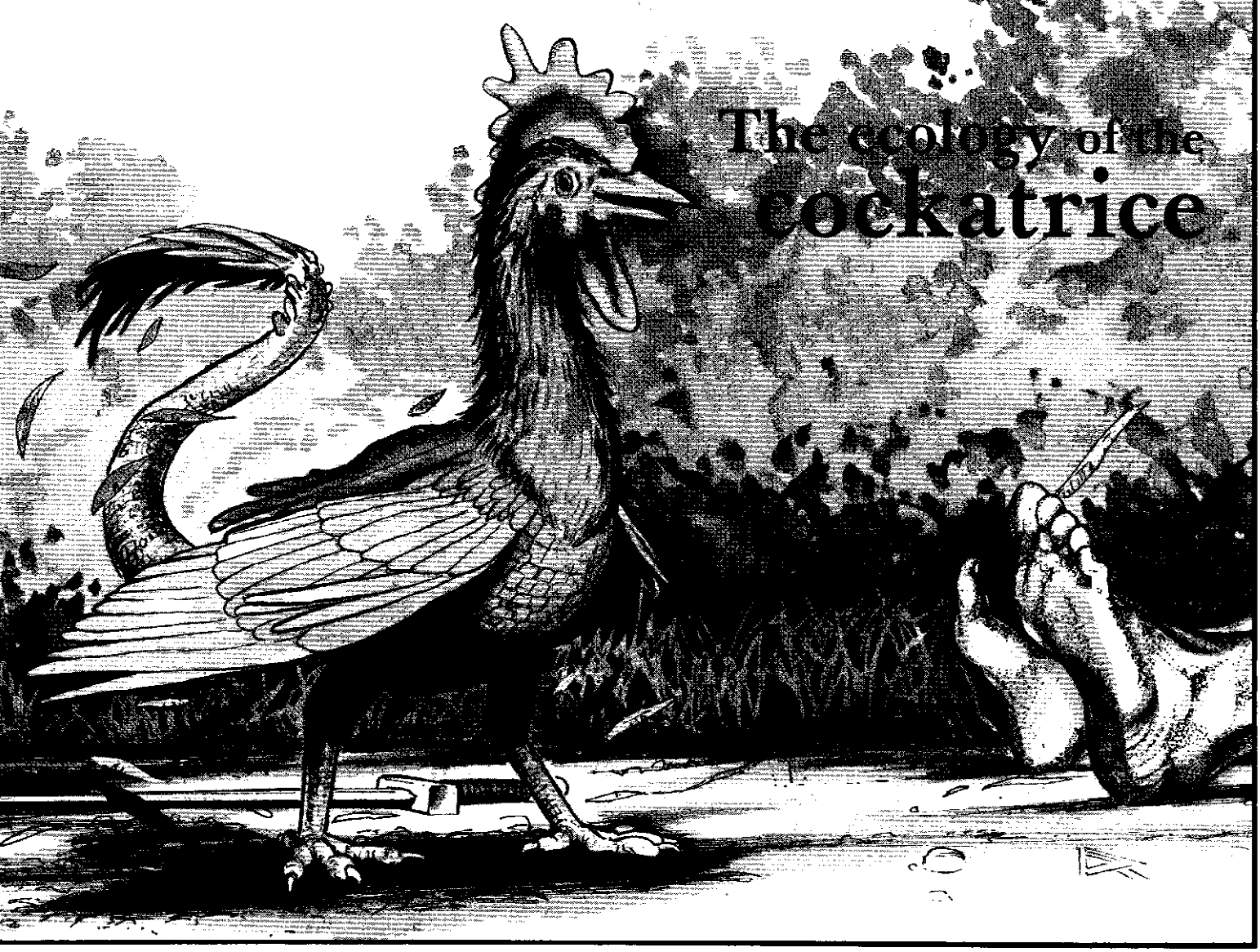

The ecology of the cockatrice

by Ed Greenwood

Recently, I asked Elminster if he knew of any folk tales of the Realms involving cockatrices. He thought for a while and then said, "Aye, many mention them briefly, turning some poor unfortunate to stone, but none dwell on their lives and habits. They are thoroughly nasty creatures and presumably are both avoided and ignored as much as possible." Then his face brightened a bit, and he continued:

"Oh, there's one good story. It concerns King Verovan of Westgate (in those days when Westgate had a king), who was a famous sea-master." Following is the tale, just as the old sage related it to me.

King Verovan delighted in rowing-races against any and all who would oppose him, wagering lands, jewels, and shiploads of wine against the freedom of the opposing crew. The king never lost, but delighted in the racing more than the winning. He needed the armies of men he won to replace those of his own rowers whose hearts, arms, or backs had given out under the furious strain of the competition.

There was no place he liked better than the tall afterdeck of his galley, the ship cutting through the waves while his slaves below heaved and grunted and sometimes screamed at the rowing-benches, and the stroke-drum thundered its beat, and the long whip in his hand leaped as though it was alive, to mark with red the sweating backs of even the prow-bench rowers as he urged his men on.

He raced, and won, for a dozen years, ranging far and wide over the seas and lakes and rivers of the Realms, until he challenged the wizards of Thay, who had, men said, a boat of magic that sat above the waves so that it flew like a bird and its hull and holds stayed dry.

Verovan wanted such a boat, if it did indeed exist, but as a mariner, he wanted to see its strengths and shortcomings first. He thought it might fare ill in a storm, for the winds could blow it about helpless as a leaf severed from its tree — and so, on the eve of a storm, he sent his challenge to the wizards. They accepted, and asked in return for the wager of their ship merely the wager of his own. Moreover, they promised, to settle any fears of magical trickery, that only the merest of their apprentices would crew the magical vessel.

Verovan agreed, delighted at such fairness and courtesy (for the wizards of Thay had a fell reputation), and the race began. Across a great gulf of the Inner Sea, round an island by a certain headland, and back again to the harbor where the wizards had received Verovan's challenge was the route, and although the strengthening wind blew in great gusts, Verovan plied his whip so eagerly that his suffering men had built up a lead of a league or more before the storm broke.

When the storm came, it was a horrible wall of wind, howling waves, and slashing rain, and Verovan saw with some satisfaction that the grey sails of the wizards' vessel were down in disarray, and the ship was being swept aside by the storm, while Verovan's rowers fought steadily on against the waves and made headway.

The waves grew mighty and broke over the rowers, running down the decks. Verovan seized a set of empty rowing-chains and fastened himself to the lashings of the great steering oar only minutes before an enormous wave swept over the afterdeck, carrying all thereon with it except for the helmsman, the stroker (who, clutching his drum, fetched up in a groaning tangle against the rail), and the king. Verovan's whip and helm were gone, swept out of his hand and off his head by the mighty wave.

The king turned to a chest nearby where spares of these items were kept, and outfitted himself once again — failing to notice that the whip he now grasped was slightly different in appearance from the one he had lost. Verovan resumed his place with angry yells, kicking the stroker upright and urging him on with shouts. The rowers picked up their cadence again, and Verovan held the whip at his side for a while, satisfied with the progress his men were making under the stroker's call.

Shortly after the worst of the storm passed, the king's galley drew abreast of a string of six jagged, rocky islands — which the still-terrible winds and waves sought to drive the ship against. The rowers roared and pulled as though demented, and Verovan again began to ply his whip like a landsman threshing grain.

But the men, it seemed, had been pushed to their limit. The more he struck them now, the more their efforts lessened, and the boat swept down rapidly, sideways on, to the crashing surf about the base of the islands. Verovan redoubled his lashings in fury — and then stopped in sudden horror as the smiling face of the wizard he had challenged appeared in the storm-wracked air before him. The visage looked at him, but did not move or speak.

In a moment Verovan was over his initial shock and had regained his usual cruel composure. "Do you mock me?" the king snarled, cutting through the image with his whip, to no effect. And then, looking away from the evil smile on the face of the wizard-image, Verovan noticed for the first time that most of his men sat at their benches motionless, as though carved of stone — and the rocks were drawing nearer.

"What has come over you?" Verovan bellowed at the statues that were once his men. "Row! Row!" he raged at them, but they did not seem to hear.

Verovan raised his whip yet again — and as the tip of it flew through his field of vision, he saw that the end of the whip bore a barb, shaped like a hawk's tail, made of feathers — cockatrice feathers! The stone-like figures on the benches grasped their unmoving oars, and now the rocks were close enough that escape from them would be impossible.

For the first time, the wizard's smiling face changed expression, breaking into a deep laugh. Then the wizard-image spoke. "It appears that the touch of your new whip is more merciful than the touch of your old one, Verovan. You cannot win the race, and so — you must forfeit your ship."

And with that, most of the galley vanished into thin air — except for a portion of the afterdeck, including the massive steering oar that Verovan was still lashed to. The king's screams were lost in the howling wind as he and the oar crashed into the waiting rocks. And it was in this way that Verovan of Westgate lost his last race.

Elminster sat back, finished with the tale, and I sighed. "A good tale, Elminster," I said, "but how can it be true? The wizards of Thay, as you admit, are not to be trusted. Is this not a mere minstrel's fancy?"

The sage shook his head. "Nay, for the stroker survived, thrown up onto one of the isles with his drum, and it is from his lips that the tale comes down."

"It is true, then," I conceded, "as much as such tales ever are. But this says little of cockatrices themselves, only that the wizards placed a magical whip in Verovan's gear — a whip of cockatrice feathers that petrified as though the creature still lived."

"Aye, I have details of that process," Elminster replied. "And I can tell thee something about the creatures themselves, besides." He then did so, and I made careful notes, so that I can summarize his remarks as follows:

The cockatrice is an unintelligent, nasty, avaricious creature, about the size of a large goose or turkey, that often flies into a fit of rage. The creature is infamous for the (permanent) *flesh to stone* power of its touch, but man is not its deliberate prey. Its habitat and habits are little known, and much confused by myth and old wives' tales. What follows is, however, known to be true, as far as it goes.

Males are more numerous than females (which lack the wattles, and have much smaller combs), and the latter are very seldom without a mate — or several mates, who will fight constantly among themselves over the female.[1]

Cockatrices are immune to their own and fellow cockatrices' petrification powers, and spend much time strutting, fighting among themselves, or foraging. A male-and-female pair (or the more unusual grouping of one strong female with several "consort" males) will mate often and noisily, screeching and cackling all the while. The female will lay a clutch of 1 or 2 eggs a month, at the waxing of the moon, which she guards watchfully while the male (or males) hunts food for her. The eggs are brownish-red, flecked with rust-red speckles, and they have hard, brittle shells. An egg that is fertile[2] will hatch in 11-19 days. An immature cockatrice is small (roughly fist-sized), but otherwise identical in appearance to its parents.[3] Such chicks grow to mature size and attain full powers in four to six months. They are then driven away by the parents, left to fend for themselves.

Cockatrices are vain, bullying creatures, and amongst themselves there is a constant battle for status. Nesting pairs consider themselves above solitary creatures or those who do not have a nest, and once a lair has been found, the cockatrice pair will build a permanent nest and continually enrich it (and thus their individual status) by lining it with treasure.

Status increases with the shininess and quantity of treasure, and there must always be the yellow gleam of gold somewhere among it for the owner to achieve true "class." Cockatrices are thus always foraging for food and treasure. Their preferred

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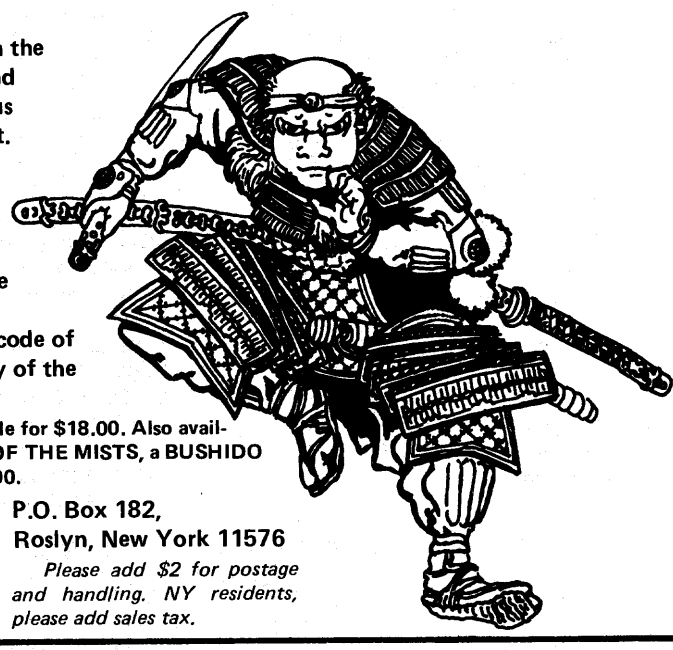

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diet consists of large, juicy beetles, small lizards, and snakes, although a cockatrice will eat all small reptiles, birds, mammals, seeds, fruit, and even fish it can catch, often subsisting largely on rodents.

It is important to note that the cockatrice can choose not to petrify by its touch (if it could not, it would never be able to eat), but this is a conscious, deliberate act of will on its part, and at all other times its touch automatically petrifies.[4] Be aware, however, that the *flesh to stone* power of the cockatrice is just that — its touch only affects the actual flesh or body of a creature, and does not work through (or upon) clothing, armor, or other inanimate objects. Thus, someone covered in head-to-toe armor has little to worry about — but someone with any sizable patch of flesh showing is in danger, for the cockatrice knows instinctively where to strike to bring about the "stoning" effect, and will aim for the vulnerable spot.[5]

Cockatrices are not strong flyers, but prefer to fight in the air against foes they deem dangerous, because they move more quickly when airborne than when on the ground. They can grapple opponents while flying, petrifying them upon a touch — whereupon most foes fall helplessly to earth.[6]

Cockatrices will never leave a nest unguarded, and will fight to the death to protect eggs or young. If a clutch of eggs happens to be entirely infertile, the parents will leave that nest (and its treasure) and go elsewhere to nest, never returning to the former location, which they seem to hate and fear; apparently they consider it cursed, bad luck, or somehow contaminated.

Large groups of cockatrices encountered are usually young driven from the nest, all of one sex and temporarily together for safety and mutual hunting strength, or several males who have located, and are now vying for the attention of, a female.

The most feared foe of the cockatrice is the pech. This creature, being immune to petrification, hunts cockatrices with impunity both for food and trade. This trading, conducted via svirfneblin, results in a few secretive sales of live cockatrices to alchemists, paranoids of all types seeking guardians, jaded collectors of exotic pets (cockatrices sell for 500-1000 gp, eggs for 300-600 gp each), and so-called sculptors. (A famous "sculptor" in Waterdeep once plied his trade by drugging human models, posing them, and then releasing his pet cockatrice upon them.) Cockatrices are generally too stupid to be easily trained, but they can be taught (by repetition) to recognize their owner and carry out the simplest of commands given by that owner, so long as those commands do not go against the creature's basic nature.

Notes

1. The cockatrice depicted in the Monster Manual is a male (males outnumber females 65% to 35%). Cockatrices may live as long as thirty winters, but the normal lifespan (assuming the creature survives infancy) is 16-20 years.

2. There is a 65% chance for each cockatrice egg laid that the egg is fertile and will hatch. This chance drops by 5% if the egg is abandoned by the mother or she is slain before it hatches. Eggs that do not hatch are eaten by the growing chicks.

3. The only substantial difference between an adult and an immature cockatrice is that the petrification effect of an immature cockatrice's touch is saved against at a +3 bonus.

4. The willful switch from petrification to non-petrification or vice versa is effectively instantaneous (taking less than 1 segment), and is believed to be both a mental and a chemical change. The direct touch of any part of a cockatrice's body causes petrification within 2 segments (unless the victim makes a successful saving throw). A cockatrice has a partial, intangible existence on the Astral and Ethereal planes as well as its corporeal existence on the Prime Material. This intangible existence consists of an aura corresponding in shape, size, and location to its physical form, and its aura petrifies on the Astral and Ethereal planes just as its body does on the Prime Material.

When a cockatrice chooses not to petrify, all parts of its body (and on the Astral and Ethereal planes, all parts of its visible aura) become "safe" (and invisible on the Astral

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and Ethereal planes) — except for the feathered end of its tail. This remains active at all times, able to petrify all living things it touches. Note that a cockatrice is well aware of this, and — not wishing to petrify its food — has careful and exact physical control and precise knowledge of the location of its tail. Note also that if a group of two or more cockatrices is encountered feeding, only one at a time actually "turns off" its petrifying power and eats; the others stand guard.

The cockatrice's petrification power does not "turn off" automatically when the creature falls asleep or is rendered unconscious, but a dead cockatrice does not retain the power — except for the uncontrollable "stoning" power of its tailfeathers, which remains in effect for 1-4 days after the creature's demise. (Saving throws against petrification by the tailfeathers are made at +1 if the cockatrice is dead or the feathers have been separated from the creature.)

Some mages (see Elminster's tale, above, and AD&D® game module WG5, "Mordenkainen's Fantastic Adventure") have devised means of preserving the petrifying powers (and physical integrity) of cockatrice tailfeathers. One such method (from the notebooks of Arbane the Mighty) is reproduced here:

For the making of whips, hats, cloaks and the like adorned with cockatrice tailfeathers, the feathers must be magically preserved. To do this, take a cauldron, and into it pour equal parts of *oil of etherealness,* aqua regia, and human tears (at least half an ounce of each). Mix this liquid well with a glass or crystal rod, and heat it to boiling while stirring in at least 6000 gp worth of powdered agate and either six whole (live or dead) cerebral parasites or the blood (7 drops or more) of a slaad, a githyanki, or a nightmare.

Stir this mixture until the solid components are dissolved, and then immerse the cockatrice feathers in the liquid while it is boiling. (A *mending* spell must be used beforehand on the feathers if they are broken, bent, or crumpled.) Take the cauldron away from the heat immediately after putting the feathers into the liquid, and let the cauldron stand until the liquid evaporates.

The cockatrice feathers will then be intact, resilient, and flexible, and will remain so forever (unless damaged or destroyed), retaining the power to permanently petrify living creatures (save vs. petrification at +1) by touch.

Feathers preserved in this fashion can only affect other creatures by direct contact on the Prime Material Plane or on the plane occupied by the bearer of the feathers; they cannot simultaneously affect creatures on the Astral or Ethereal planes or any other plane except the one that the feathers are physically present on.

5. If the flesh of a cockatrice's opponent is revealed to any substantial degree (bare arms or bare legs, for instance), it can be assumed that a hit by the creature in melee has struck the vulnerable part of the target's body, and thus petrification is possible. If a would-be victim is almost entirely covered (only showing a bare head, bare hands, or bare feet, for instance), then the Dungeon Master must use judgment to determine the outcome of a cockatrice strike. For instance, it might be ruled that after a successful "to hit" roll, the cockatrice has a chance of striking exposed flesh, and that chance is equal to the approximate percentage of the victim's body which is uncovered (perhaps 10% for bare feet, 15% for bare head, 25% for bare arms, etc.). Then, if that percentage is achieved on a second roll, the cockatrice has succeeded in striking the exposed flesh. (If more than one quarter of a target's body is exposed, it can be assumed that the cockatrice automatically lands its strike in that area.) The victim is always allowed a saving throw to avoid the petrification effect, but even if the save is made the target will take damage from the strike of the cockatrice's beak.

6. Cockatrices are of maneuverability class C, and must rest for at least 1 turn after 2-5 turns of flight. (How fast each creature tires depends upon the strength, weight, age, and present condition of the individual cockatrice.) Note that the creature's aerial movement rate is fully three times faster than its ground movement; the cockatrice is well aware of this, and often uses short, flapping flights to pursue prey or escape immediate danger. ✠

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The ecology of the GULGUTHRA

by Ed Greenwood

The Gulguthra, or "Dung-Eaters" (the otyugh and neo-otyugh), are strange and deadly creatures indeed. I asked Elminster about them some time ago, and it happened that upon his next visit the house was — unexpected by us both — full of children; a captive audience to any sage worth his tongue. Elminster did not disappoint.

"Gather round," he said with a twinkle in his eye, "and I'll tell you of Erammon and the Kitchen Midden." He waited until the small whirlwind of visiting nieces and nephews had settled at his feet, and his pipe had drawn into life, green smoke rings rising from it. I had introduced him as "Uncle El," and he was enjoying the role gleefully — although he had muttered an aside to me that it had better only last this one night. I'll set down the tale as he told it — although, of course, without the voices'. (Elminster is a master vocal mimic when he wants to be.)

Erammon was a minor lordling of the eastern Dales — of Harrowdale on the Inner Sea. even then a sleepy farmers' land. His father, the Lord Oraun, was wise and just, strong in battle, and well respected in the Dales. Erammon was a young prince like any other, reckless and fun-loving and full of himself. He longed for battles and ravening monsters and fell wizards so that he could swing his shining sword and win the day and walk into the taverns in Harrowdale to a hero's welcome (and not the usual hushed, wary silence). One day he asked his swordmaster why Harrowdale was so tranquil (that was not the word he used) and why his father was so respected as a fighter, since Oraun never seemed to fight.

The swordmaster, old Thaeron, replied: "Harrowdale's at peace because it's strong, boy, and it's strong because of your father. I fought with him, in the wars with Thar and with the outcasts of Sembia; he's a man to be feared over blades."

"But why then does he not fight?" Erammon persisted. "Why does he not raid into the elven-woods, or strike down the upstart in Scardale?"

Thaeron fixed a cold eye on the prince and said, "The wise man fights only when he has to. The fewer enemies made,. the fewer to come at you all at once."

"But father *has* enemies," said Erammon. "Scardale, and Featherdale — and

everyone's an enemy of Archendale. . . ."

"Aye, but they are enemies who fear him more than they hate him. Remember that, boy — when the hate overcomes the fear, you'll see their swords. Besides, your father protects the dales to the south from the fell elves, and the brigands who live in the woods along the river Lis."

"But I've never even seen an elf, or a brigand!" Erammon protested.

"He does a good job, then," replied Thaeron, wrinkling his moustache into what might have been a grin.

"But how do the other lords think these brigands, and the elves, so dangerous — and Harrowdale's force of arms so strong?" the prince demanded.

Thaeron was silent for a moment, and then said, "Those who come threatening your father, or, come uninvited, he does not protect — and they vanish; this the other lords know."

"But I've never seen any fighting, nor any strangers with swords."

"Only brigands threaten with swords, boy," Thaeron answered. "Learn that, if you learn nothing else from me." The swordmaster paused, jerked his head in the direction of the feasting hall, and said, "Come."

"To the hall?" Erammon asked, following hastily.

"This is where all guests come, is it not?" Thaeron replied, waving an arm at the great hall, where servants were scrubbing and dusting and filling lamps with oil for the evening ahead. "Aye," Erammon said, not understanding why the swordmaster had brought him here.

"And then they go to your father's chambers for wine and sweets, do they not?" Thaeron continued.

"Aye," said the prince again — and then his mind leaped ahead. "You mean . . . poison?" At that, Thaeron turned on him a look of such cold disgust that the prince recoiled as though menaced by a dagger-thrust.

"No! You think the other lords have no spies in our kitchens? Nor your father in theirs? No one dares to use poison in the Dales, lest all the other lords retaliate."

"What, then?"

"Some visitors disappear, do they not?" the swordmaster asked, returning to his earlier line of discourse. Erammon nodded. "So, even you have noticed that," the old warrior said sarcastically.

"And how not?" said Erammon in an irritated tone. "Word spreads, among travelers as well as among those who live in Harrowdale."

"Aye, talk travels," Thaeron agreed. "Those who disappear are brigands, or so your father tells the gossips."

"But — no bones? No corpses on the battlements?" Erammon asked, still bewildered. The pair kept walking through the hall, and Thaeron made a gesture toward the far end.

"The kitchens? You mean we *eat* . . . ?" The prince gasped and began to go pale.

Thaeron shook his head. "One so dense will not hold Harrowdale for long, helmhead!" he barked. "What is a corpse but garbage? And where do the kitchen-maids throw the garbage?"

"In the midden," Erammon said, following the swordmaster up to a stout, barred wooden door.

"Have you not wondered why the balcony of your father's audience chamber overlooks the stink of his kitchen midden?" Thaeron asked, unlocking the last chain and hurling its bar aside.

"Oh." Erammon thought for a moment. "Yes . . . yes, so it does. But why?"

Thaeron swung open the door and pointed out into the fetid pit beyond, ringed by a stout palisade of weathered timbers. "Look out to the base of the wall there . . . look hard, and look for an enemy." Erammon peered into the midden as he had been told, and suddenly realized that he had locked gaze with —

"An eye!" he cried. "An eye — coming up from the ground like a worm!"

Thaeron was already pulling the door closed, but an instant before it slammed shut, Erammon saw the festering garbage ripple, undulating right before his wide eyes as though the refuse itself was alive.

"But — but — what is it, out there?" Erammon fairly screamed.

Thaeron fastened chains and set bars in place for a long time before he turned to face the prince. When he did, his face was blank, his eyes cold and level. "Only your father can tell you that, Erammon," he said. "And if I were you, I'd make sure he was in a good mood when I asked him."

The children were petrified, or thrilled, or asleep when Elminster finished the tale. They were tucked into their beds, and "Uncle El" and I took up mugs of cocoa and sat for a time in silence, enjoying the peace of the evening by the fireside. Then I broke the quiet, opening a discussion I could wait no longer to have.

"That was an otyugh in the midden?" I asked, for the benefit of my hidden tape recorder.

"Was," Elminster replied. "It turns out that Lashan, at least, knew of it — when he overran Harrowdale, his archers emptied flasks of oil and then quiversfull of flaming arrows from that balcony until the whole midden was aflame."

"What about Erammon?"

"He lives, some say, hiding in exile, but has not come to reclaim his seat since Lashan's fall. Certainly his body has not been found. Thaeron died fighting Lashan's armies . . . and of course Oraun died of heart-stop some winters ago." The sage stared into the fire and shrugged. "Interesting times, indeed. But I have more than a tale to answer your query. I have brought with me a certain document, and know more besides. Bend thine ears, then — and be sure that recording instrument you hide so well is working properly."

I flushed a bit, shifted in my seat to hide my embarrassment, and leaned forward attentively as Elminster began to read. . . .

From a report by Phiraz of the Naturalists to the Commissioner of Public Sewers in the city of Scornubel:

. . . The greatest of the nuisance creatures that will plague your system is the "dungheap" or otyugh, a scavenger of the strangest appearance and habits. The otyugh and its larger cousin, the neo-otyugh, share the form of a pile of festering dung with a toothed maw set into it. An otyugh's body is lumpy, mottled purple, green, and (primarily) brown, and the creature stumps about on three fat legs of similar appearance. From this delightful bulk — which the creature is wont to bury in piles of rubbish and dung — protrude two long[1] ridged tentacles with large, heart-shaped gripping ends, and a flesh-colored and segmented wormlike stalk containing two yellow-purple eyes. A buried otyugh watches its surroundings constantly by means of this stalk, so look for it when you suspect that one of these creatures is near.

An otyugh is never surprised by the approach of a creature; take care that you or your men are not in turn surprised by one lying in wait. Otyughs often happily attack and kill parties of three people or less; they will eat fresh meat as readily as they consume carrion, dung, or offal. Beware this predator!

Otyughs are terrifically strong, able to snatch warriors off their feet, armor and all, and fling them aside as children throw dolls. They are under no circumstances to be fought a1one.[2]

The otyugh is most often solitary, but may exist in symbiosis with another (often more dangerous or energetic) creature, such as a doppleganger, ettin, will-o-the-wisp, or even a beholder. For such creatures they serve to guard treasure, which they always conceal at the very bottom of their offal pile, hidden from view beneath the otyugh itself. Encountering an otyugh is bad enough — but if you do see one, be sure to look around for another even more fearsome foe!

Thankfully, otyughs mate only seldom (perhaps once in every seven years or so), traveling by night and subterranean routes to bonepits deep under the earth, where the remains of many ancient creatures lie in vast layers. There they mate in mass gatherings with others of their kind who have made the same journey.[3]

Notes

1. Elminster provided precise details of a gulguthra's reach (tentacles can grow up to 14 feet in length, fully extended) and senses. An otyugh can communicate telepathically with creatures up to 4" away; the neo-otyugh's telepathic range is 6", and the higher intelligence of the latter creature enables it to communicate on a more sophisticated level with creatures it encounters. Only rarely, however, will a gulguthra initiate such communication, for it has little

to "say" to any other creatures. The eyes of a gulguthra have infravision and ultravision, both out to a range of 9". Both eyes are positioned on the same side of their stalk, but this does not contribute to any lack of alertness because the eyestalk continually swivels, periscope-style, and any creature that comes within range of its visual powers is instantly detected. (The creature does sleep, but only when it is not threatened, and even in this semi-dormant state, its eyestalk and eyes function as though it were awake, for the purpose of detecting approaching creatures.) The eyes function very well in gloom or darkness, but narrow to mere blurred slits in bright sunlight — for which reason the creature lives below ground. The presence of a torch or the casting of a *light* spell can sometimes so disconcert these creatures that they do not attack. Gulguthras cannot smell with any acuity, probably due to the dung and decay that customarily surrounds them, and so they cannot track prey, nor readily discern the true natures of disguised creatures.

2. Phiraz, never having fought a gulguthra and having viewed only one such encounter through the eyes of a sedentary scholar and not a fighting-man, is both vague and brief as to their fighting style and abilities. Elminster has other sources, and their information boils down to this: When it is attacking, an otyugh's tentacles erupt from the concealing pile of offal and slap victims with force equivalent to 18 (no percentile) strength for purposes of matching the creature's grip or the force of its thrust against the strength of an opponent. A tentacle does 1-8 points of damage on a slap that hits its target, and can also curl about an opponent within range, constricting for 2-4 points of damage per round until the hold is broken. The otyugh can lift a grasped opponent and hurl the victim into a pit or against a wall; the more intelligent neo-otyugh also likes to use a grasped creature as a shield, flailing the victim about to fend off attacks from other adversaries.

Either sort of creature can sense when a grasped opponent is weakened or disabled, and will try to push such prey into reach of its suckerlike, toothed mouth. Due to the creature's favored habitat (proximity to dung and carrion) and its digestive system (wastes are spat back out of its mouth), anyone bitten will suffer both 2-5 points of damage and a 90% likelihood of contracting *typhus* (treat as a parasitic infestation; see pages 13-14 of the DMG). There are no known cases of gulguthra suffering from any such diseases carried in waste and filth themselves, and they are thought to be immune or at least highly resistant to these.

3. Phiraz again is vague; his research had gone so far as to confirm at least the partial truth (periodic journeys far underground) of a legend concerning gulguthra mating — but, having a mistrust of legends, he merely reported it briefly and without comment. Elminster checked with the sorcerer known as Jovriam of the Mines, and certain svirfnebli, and was able to glean the following facts and observations:

Every gulguthra is bisexual. Each produces, once every seven winters, a jellylike "eggmass" and travels underground (in a slow, patient journey) by instinct and memory until it reaches others of its kind. Then it regurgitates the eggmass from a secondary stomach and wanders off, that part of its task done. In some manner not yet understood, another gulguthra can fertilize any eggmass (except its own) by taking it briefly into its mouth, or perhaps some internal organ, and expelling it again.

An eggmass that is fertilized, if left undisturbed, will develop in one week's time into a miniature version of the parent that provided the eggmass. (An otyugh eggmass will only produce another otyugh, and likewise for the neo-otyugh, even though either species can fertilize any eggmass.) This "newborn" creature is driven by an instinctual urge to find warmth and food, and will wander off to seek its own "fortune," returning to its birthplace years later to breed in its turn.

Gulguthra young are smaller (3-5 HD) and weaker (damage of 1-6/1-6/1-4, tentacle strength of 16) than mature specimens, but are otherwise identical to their parents, and grow to maturity within 4 months.

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The ecology of the

GORGON

by Ed Greenwood

"The gorgon," Elminster told me severely, "is best avoided."

I nodded. And waited. He eyed me for two or three puffs of his pipe, and then sighed. "I expect you will heed that advice — and," he added with a wry smile, "I. also expect you will want an explanation."

"Oh, yes," I responded. "And who better to provide that explanation than yourself?"

"Very well," said the sage, satisfied that I had played my part by showing the proper respect for him and his knowledge. "I will tell you what I know, and what I have heard, about the gorgon. The folk where I grew up called it the 'stone bull.' They killed one by loosing a rust monster upon it and thus forcing it into a dead-end cavern, and then unleashing several volleys of arrows — but several members of the hunting party did not return to share in the glory of their accomplishment. I know of no tales about the gorgon that have a happy ending."

"Indeed," I chimed in. "Still, there are a lot of unanswered questions about the beast."

"Aye," Elminster agreed. "I have with me an excerpt from a traveller's diary, and the researches of several colleagues of mine, notably Asheyron of Arabel, who possesses an amulet that prevents petrification. He tells me, by the way, that a gorgon's breath smells like stewed cabbage."

The excerpt is reproduced below, followed by footnotes that sum up what Elminster had to say about Asheyron's research (and that of Elephras of Melvaunt and Kiiragar of Port Llast). From the way he expressed himself, it is obvious that Elminster hates gorgons; in fact, he revealed that he once lost a pet dog to one. I asked him what he would do if he met a gorgon, and he indicated a piece of jewelry around his neck, half-hidden by his beard. "This is a thing of magic — a necklace of missiles," he said. "This big bauble near the center is my gorgon-killer."

From the diaries of the adventurer and naturalist Djaril Phylapur:

The gorgon is a bull-like creature greatly feared by travellers in the wilderness hereabout, because of its fearsome breath. Four times each day a gorgon can turn creatures to stone by its breath, using this attack whenever it meets creatures it senses to be dangerous, such as man.[1] Certain beasts (notably the xorn, pech, piercer, rust monster, earth elemental, and the gorgon itself) are known to be immune to this effect, and other such immunities doubtless remain to be discovered. Gorgons will ignore an apparently petrified victim, instinctively realizing that it is no longer dangerous. Some have been known to escape the creature by feigning death — but just as many others have tried this tactic and failed, because they were unable to keep completely still, and their deception was found out. Even the mere blink of an eye at the wrong time will alert the gorgon to the fact that its quarry is still alive — for the moment.

Gorgons are omnivorous, subsisting on carrion, vegetable material of all types, and small creatures which they gore or trample but do not petrify, seeing them as food and not potential adversaries. A lone, unarmed or weak human or humanoid would be considered food, and attacked as such; a creature that is petrified is a meal forever lost.

The breathing of the petrifying vapors is entirely a voluntary act, these vapors being produced by and stored in an internal organ opening into the roof of the mouth. The corpse of a gorgon is often still dangerous for hours after the beast's death, as a result of the slow seepage of this gas from the still-active organ, or the sudden explosion of a full cloud of gas that will envelop anyone or anything that disturbs the body. After this seepage has run its course, the gas-producing mechanism within the gorgon's body is inert and useless, so no one has succeeded in storing or synthesizing this gas, and its nature and method of manufacture remain a mystery.

Gorgons are always in an irritable mood,

and quick to attack.[2] They will kill prey whenever it is encountered (even if their appetites are presently sated, in which case they may return to devour the prey at a later time). They lair in wilderness caverns, canyons, or "badland" areas, and there they keep treasure acquired from prey. The spoils found in a gorgon lair will be chiefly coinage and other metallic treasure, which is useful to distract the attention of would-be gorgon-killers (including rust monsters) that might stumble upon such a hoard.

The skin of a gorgon is covered with close-fitting, irregularly shaped metal scales. The scales are actually composed of impure iron; in order to maintain their strength and durability, a gorgon must derive substantial amounts of iron from its diet, chiefly from green plants and the blood of mammals. The gorgon cannot consume actual metal, in either raw or relined form (such as a suit of armor), and accumulates such metal as part of its "treasure," as described above.

The scales are coated with a waxy secretion that is constantly drying out and being worn away, and at the same time is continually replenished by the beast's internal processes (exuding from the cartilaginous seams between the scales). This coating keeps a gorgon's scales from rusting due to rain or dampness, and — coupled with the irregular shapes and curves of the scales — makes a gorgon difficult to grapple, and causes many blows to glance off its hide. The plates are rather soft (being easily marked by weapon-blows, even if those blows do not actually harm the creature), but are both thick and durable; they will not crack under crushing blows. The scales are useful as a source of iron for smelting (although other, better sources are usually available), but cannot be used directly for protection — for example, as bucklers — because they are too small and too soft. A gorgon plate of average size might bring a price of 10 copper pieces, or perhaps more if it is sold in an area where metal is scarce and in great demand.

The creature most feared by the gorgon is the rust monster, and gorgons rarely delve deeply into subterranean areas as a result. Rust monsters are themselves well armored against a gorgon's hooves and horns, and view gorgon scales as a desirable and substantial meal. At the touch of their antennae, a scale will rust and fall off[3], and although a biting, kicking gorgon will rarely let a rust monster munch happily upon the result (usually biting off its antennae or overturning the rust monster with a horn and then running away), the damage is then done. For their part, rust monsters can move more rapidly than gorgons can, and will pursue one, or even a group of gorgons, fearlessly.

Gorgons often hunt[5] together in small bands (of two mated[6] pairs, three males plus a female that one or all of them are courting, four or fewer young males, and so on). They wander a wide range, and typically know of most caverns (potential lairs) within a sixty-mile radius. If large numbers of human, demi-human, or humanoid creatures begin to move into a gorgon-inhabited area, solitary gorgons and isolated pairs not raising young will gather in the more inaccessible and labyrinthine caverns for mutual protection.

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Notes

1. The breath weapon of a gorgon consists of a truncated cone-shaped cloud of visible, misty grey-green vapors. For reasons not fully understood, this cloud exists simultaneously on the Astral, Ethereal, and Prime Material Planes, and has the same effect upon creatures in any of those environments that are within the area the cloud occupies. Any creature enveloped by the cloud of vapors (which billows out with some force to fill a conical area, ½" wide at the gorgon's maw to a maximum diameter of 2" and a maximum length of 6", within 2 segments) must save versus petrification to avoid being turned to stone (which takes effect in 1-4 segments thereafter, and is permanent unless somehow counteracted at a later time). The vapors hang in the air throughout the round after the round in which they were expelled, clearly visible, and are effective until the end of this second round, whereupon they will have dissipated sufficiently to lose their petrifying power. Gorgon breath does not work underwater, and will be harmlessly destroyed by the whirlwind of an air elemental, a wind walker, or similar force of moving air. A *gust of wind* spell or similar effect will merely shift an intact breath cloud from 1" to 6" in the direction of the gust. A creature who has successfully saved versus a cloud of vapors can remain in, re-enter, or move through its confines without fear of petrification — but any creature entering a particular gorgon-breath cloud must make a save; i.e., if characters are battling a gorgon who breathes in four successive rounds, they must save four times, even if the clouds are all breathed in the same area and the characters do not change their locations. If the breath weapons of two or more gorgons overlap, however, a creature within their confines need make only one save, not two or more.

A spell caster employing a statue spell prior to encountering breath vapors is immune to petrification while in statue form, as is a druid within a tree, and any character(s) in an extra-dimensional space created by a *rope trick, portable hole,* or similar magic.

Petrified creatures are immobile and have no sense of the passage of time, nor awareness of their surroundings (they are effectively deaf, dumb, and blind, but still technically alive). Some soon become insane; most sleep, retreating from conscious awareness into an endless dream-world. They may be conversed with by means of *stone tell,* or mentally communicated with by *ESP* or *telepathy* magic and similar

psionic powers. A stone to flesh spell will free a petrified creature, but *dispel magic* will not. "Stoned" creatures are immune to all illusion and vision-related magics (e.g., *demi-shadow monsters)*, and cannot be affected by fire, electricity, any death magic, or spoken *power words* — but a *dig*, *shatter*, or *disintegrate* spell will destroy such a creature instantly.

2. In battle, gorgons breathe, gore with horns, strike with hooves, or bite — listed in order of preference; only one type of attack is possible per round.

Goring (or ripping and slashing) with horns does 2-12 hit points of damage (-1 per die of damage if the target is bearing a shield or wearing plate mail in such a location or manner as to lessen the strike). On a natural "to hit" roll of 20, a gorgon has impaled a victim with its horns; the character takes maximum damage (12 hp) on the round in which impaling occurs, and may (50% chance) remain impaled for one round afterward, taking another 2-8 points of damage if this is the case. (A gorgon can mount another attack in the round during which a victim remains impaled, but obviously this cannot be an attack with the horns.)

Gorgons can readily stand and walk about on their hind legs as well as on all fours (movement rate is the same in either stance), and can rise up on their hind legs to lash out with their front hooves. In most cases (75% of the time), the gorgon will only strike with one front hoof, using the other foreleg for balance. Its hooves do 2-8 points of damage apiece so that a creature that is trampled may suffer as much as 8-32 (2-8 times 4) points of damage if all four hooves hit. The gorgon's rear hooves can lash out just as their front ones do, but the creature will only use this attack form if it is assaulted from behind — and obviously it cannot lash out with front hooves and rear hooves both in the same round.

A gorgon rarely bites in battle unless its breath weapon is expended (or the beast has chosen not to use it) and its horns are gone or encumbered (usually by another, impaled creature). A gorgon bite does 1-3 points of damage; this attack mode is often employed to finish off a victim that has been incapacitated or rendered unconscious by its other physical attacks, and which the gorgon intends to use as a meal.

3. The attack of a rust monster upon a gorgon only affects the one or two body plates that are touched by the rust monster's antennae; the non-metallic, cartilage-like seams between plates prevent the rusting effect from traveling any farther than the plate(s) it actually hits. A rusted, corroded plate will immediately (in the same round) detach from the skin underneath and fall off. A gorgon cannot re-grow or otherwise replace body plates that fall off (due to rusting or any other effect). A young gorgon's plates will grow in area and thickness as the creature matures, but will always be the "original equipment"; i.e., there is no moulting or shedding process involved.

The repeated loss of body plates can render a gorgon more vulnerable to physical attacks; whenever 20% or more of the surface area of a gorgon's body is devoid of metal plates, there is a chance equal to that percentage that a strike against the gorgon's body will be made against AC 8 (the unprotected area) instead of AC 2 (the creature's normal armor class).

4. A gorgon can see in normal light as well as a man does, and simultaneously use normal vision out to a 6" distance on the Astral and Ethereal Planes. It has infravision out to a range of 8", on the Prime Material Plane only. A gorgon can smell most creatures within 3", and will always try to confront (or in some way react to) a creature it detects by smell — whether it is a potential meal, a strong adversary who must be fought off or killed, or a rust monster, which must be led to another source of metal and then fled from as fast as possible.

5. Male and female gorgons are identical in size and powers and are externally indistinguishable (except to other gorgons). A mated pair will stay together for 2-6 years and will reproduce approximately once a year (more often if food is plentiful, less often if it is not). The female will bear 1-3 offspring 6-8 months after mating, and will keep to the lair (her mate hunting for her) from the fourth month of pregnancy until she gives birth. A newborn gorgon is able to move and attack for itself at one month of age; young are size S, have 3 hit dice, can breathe a half-normal-size cloud of vapors twice per day, and do half normal damage on all physical attacks. At 3 months of age a young gorgon has grown to size M and 5 hit dice, and can use its breath weapon (still a half-sized cloud) three times per day. A gorgon reaches full adult size and powers within 5-7 months after being born. It will achieve maturity (the ability to mate) at the age of two years, at which time it will leave its parents' lair (if it has not done so already). Very rarely, a gorgon will mate with a chimera to produce a gorgimera (see Monster Manual II and DRAGON® issue #94), but the two creatures will not habitually consort together for any length of time.

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The ecology of the Will-o-Wisp

by Nigel D. Findley

We are dead men; I know it. The knowledge is dry and dusty on my tongue — but not bitter.

I have drunk of life deeply and to the dregs these five-score summers, and I thank my elven sire for the equanimity to view death as I should. No, it is not for myself that I grieve, but for these others: for Nex, the young guide who — at my direction — led us into this accursed marsh and who still claims he can lead us out alive; for the nameless mage who rides with us, grey cowl pulled forward over raven tresses to mask her sorrow; and, most of all, for the boy Tristan, her apprentice — if such is the word — who edges his pony ever closer to his mistress's bay and looks up to her for comfort she cannot give. For, when the Corpse Lights come again after sundown, as come they shall, we will be unable to turn them away a second time. The slender silver wand that the enchantress used to such effect last night is almost drained, and, without its power, even the stout bow slung across our guide's shoulders will offer us no hope. As for my own Talent . . . it leans more towards scrying than combat. I am no warrior-mage like the fierce beauty riding before me.

When this day ends, so do all our lives.

Still, if but one person finds this document and the translation it contains, and wins through with it to civilization, then our deaths will not have been entirely for naught — or so I try to console myself. The information I have stumbled upon concerning the Corpse Lights could be of inestimable value — if it is ever seen by living man.

We found the scroll tube yesterday forenoon, as the sun was just struggling above the miasma that cloaks the treacherous ground. It was shielded and warded by a small globe of faint silver light that flared briefly to brilliance — in recognition of a kindred spirit, perhaps? — then collapsed upon itself as I reached out with my Talent toward it.

My companions gathered around — even Nex, for the marsh seemed home to no large creatures to be on guard against[1] — as I removed the wax stopper from the tube of dark gold. The scroll within crackled as I drew forth and unrolled it.

I could tell by the frowns of those around me that the script on the parchment meant nothing to them, but that concerned me not at all. Though the scribe's hand was cramped and hurried, I recognized a disused elven dialect that I had learned as a curiosity at my father's knee. My eyes grew wide as I read, then closed in sadness when I realized that I could as well have been reading our death warrant.

There is neither space nor time to furnish a complete translation of that long-passed elfs last work. As I ride, I will attempt to set down what I can, then, when the sun sinks into the marsh-fog, I will follow my predecessor and use my Talent to ward my final document. Hopefully, in time, it will be found and read by one more fortunate than I, one who will spread the knowledge about the Corpse Lights for which I have paid with my life.

Firstly, the Corpse Light — or the will-o-wisp, to use its seemingly more common name — is not innately a magical creature. No, even though its form — a glowing ball of light — and powers seem to give me lie, it is more a creature of nature than one of dweomercraft.

As the many species of demi-humankind have risen — or so say the wise — above their baser antecedents, thus has the will-o-wisp risen above its forebears. As we have left-behind us our more brutish nature (or so we hope), thus has the Corpse Light left behind it the tyranny of matter, progressing to a higher state of being.

How this can be I do not claim to know, yet so proposes the long-dead author of the scroll. Perhaps some Talent of the will-o-wisp's progenitor hastened its evolution. Perhaps its rapid advance is a boon from whatever god the will-o-wisp may have worshiped. Perhaps we shall never know. I feel certain that the will-o-wisps themselves will never tell us.

By whatever means the evolution may have occurred, that it did occur is impossible to deny when one looks upon the immature form of the will-o-wisp: the boggart. No wonder that wild and dangerous creature, commonly close in appearance to a young demi-human[2], is so often found in proximity to the will-o-wisp; they are the same creature. The relationship is confirmed by the boggart's ability to take the guise of an adult will-o-wisp.

Many who would have fallen prey to a boggart have been warned of their foe's nature by the creature's mercurial changes in form. Such is obvious. But, surprisingly, a boggart's change can warn of the very presence of the creature. According to the manuscript, the change from non-corporeal to corporeal is accompanied by a sharp drop in the temperature of the surroundings. The reverse is also true. If one is unlucky enough to be in the vicinity when a boggart makes its final transition to adult form, a pulse of heat can warn of the fact, though little good such a warning would be to most[3].

The elven manuscript describes the adult will-o-wisp as a lattice of information with no material substance — "a scroll with no parchment," the sage writes — much as is a *symbol* or a cleric's *glyph of warding*. It is crystalline energy, self-sustaining and potentially immortal. From this nature come the will-o-wisp's main powers: electrical bolts and levitation. The glow that comes from the lattice can be quenched temporarily, giving it its temporary invisibility[4].

But the will-o-wisp has yet another boon, a form of limited telepathy. This, coupled with its high intelligence, makes it an awesome foe, as many have found to their loss[5].

How does as intangible a creature as the will-o-wisp reproduce? The question has oft been asked, but never before answered. The elven manuscript proposes the following.

There are *three* genders of will-o-wisp, to all intents and purposes identical in appearance, powers and behavior; all are required for the production of an offspring.

The reproductive act itself takes place usually deep within an impenetrable marsh — necessary to protect the participants. The three will-o-wisps draw close together and apparently merge their forms together, becoming one. The event is over in a moment: almost immediately the tripartite will-o-wisp flares to intolerable brightness, then splits once more into three. Left behind is an infant boggart. If one wished to destroy a will-o-wisp, now would be the ideal time, since the three parents are in a severely weakened state after the mating[6].

Mating appears to take place in cycles. Adult will-o-wisps congregate rarely, but when they do they tend to mate three — or sometimes more — times within a period of about a week. When the boggarts are born, the parents share the nursing chores.

After the boggarts are capable of hunting, the parents leave them to fend for themselves. The boggarts, however, tend to stay together — I know not whether for social reasons or simply because three can hunt more efficiently than one — until they reach maturity.[7]

As to the social philosophy of the will-o-wisps — what gods they worship, what they see as their place in the cosmos — the manuscript says nothing. It does note that the will-o-wisps have no love for gold and gems or for things magical; those things that men see as treasure have no value for them. The will-o-wisps do collect any material wealth possessed by their victims, however, for they know the strong — and often fatal — attraction that gold has for men. The Corpse Lights bait their traps well.

I can write no more. The sun is sinking into the marsh-fog, and it is time to seal — this, my final work, into its tube and ward it as did my long-dead patron. Will it ever be seen by living man? I can only hope so.

The preparations are being made. Nex is stringing his bow and honing his broadheads to razor-keenness. Our warrior-mage is composing herself for what must be her final battle. And young Tristan is making his peace with his gods.

And I? I wrap my cloak closer about me to keep out the night's chill.

The time is upon us. To the east is a deathly glow, waxing coldly through the fog.

I wish I could believe it were the moon.

Notes:

1. Few creatures with an intelligence of *semi-* or better will be found in the vicinity of will-o-wisps, since such creatures represent prey, and a will-o-wisp will never decline to feed if food is easily available. The only such creatures present will be those that managed to escape the will-o-wisps, those that are yet to be detected by them, or those that are too powerful for the will-o-wisps to trifle with (blue dragons are a fair example). In an area determined by the DM to contain will-o-wisps, for any random encounter that generates a creature of intelligence *semi-* or better but with fewer than 7 HD, roll percentile dice: 01-80 indicates that the encounter has not taken place at all; 81-00 indicates the encounter is with fugitives from will-o-wisps, in which case the maximum number of creatures encountered is 20.

2. As described in the *Monster Manual II,* the boggart can take on the form of an adult will-o-wisp or of a small demi-human or humanoid (usually a small halfling or gnome, a goblin imp, a young xvart, or a norker neut). It can also become invisible for a short period of time. This ability to change form — and the instability of form described in the *Monster Manual II* — is a result of the true nature of the will-o-wisp.

When it first enters the world, the young boggart is in the form of a newborn humanoid. This infant is nondescript in appearance; it has no features that distinguish it as one humanoid or demi-human race as opposed to another. The young boggart grows rapidly; within two weeks, it is the same size as an average two-year-old human. During this time, the boggart is given energy by a parent and so does not have to feed.

It is at this point that the boggart's vagueness of form — and concomitantly its electrical powers — begins to manifest itself. The boggart begins to slip into will-o-wisp form — a ball of light, smaller and brighter than an adult will-o-wisp. The change occurs rarely, without warning and without volition, and lasts, at first, for only a segment or two. When the boggart returns to physical form, its appearance may match any demi-human or humanoid race that it has seen (thus, as the young boggart's experience grows, it can take on more different forms; conversely, if a particular boggart has never seen a human, it cannot take on human form). Each time it resumes humanoid form, it is a little larger.

At this stage, the boggart possesses a rudimentary form of electrical power. It can deliver a shock of 1-6 points by touch and fire an electrical bolt (once every other round, to a range of 10 feet) delivering 1-6 points of damage. The boggart is so inaccurate with this bolt, however, that the target gets two saving throws. If it makes the first one, it takes no damage (the boggart missed); if it makes the second, it takes only 1-3 points of damage. These powers increase with age until, at two years, the boggart's damage potential matches the figures listed in the *Monster Manual II.*

As soon as the boggart gains its electrical power, the parent that protected it and nursed it with energy abandons it to fend

for itself. The boggart must now- begin feeding itself physically *(i.e.,* hunting).

As the boggart grows and ages, its form shifts become more frequent and more prolonged until, also at the age of two years, its characteristics match those in the *Monster Manual II.* It is also at the age of two years that it gains its invisibility and *confusion* powers. At the age of five years, the boggart makes its final transition to adult will-o-wisp form, possessing from the outset the full powers listed in the *Monster Manual.*

3. When the boggart shifts from corporeal to non-corporeal form *(i.e.,* from humanoid form to will-o-wisp form), the body of the creature literally disintegrates. The position of every atom in that body is remembered by the non-corporeal creature. The matter that actually made up the body is converted into energy.

Some of this tremendous energy yield is consumed fueling the non-corporeal being of the creature; the vast majority is channeled off to the Negative Material Plane. (It is this close connection with the Negative Material Plane that grants the will-o-wisp immunity to most magical spells. Only those that disturb the actual non-material lattice of the will-o-wisp's existence can damage it.) When the reverse change occurs, the body is re-built following the template in the mind of the boggart. The actual matter required for the body is re-created using energy withdrawn from the Negative Material Plane.

But, when the humanoid boggart reforms, it is larger than it was before. The energy debt represented by this additional mass is withdrawn from the environment, lowering the local temperature. This sudden, transient temperature drop can be perceived by creatures within 30' of the boggart, although being able to perceive it does not necessarily mean being able to interpret it.

When the final transition to will-o-wisp form occurs, the energy released is not all transferred to the Negative Material Plane; rather, a portion affects the environment. This heat pulse will cause 1-6 points of damage to any unprotected creature within 30 feet of the will-o-wisp, and it can be perceived from distances of up to 200 feet.

4. The fact that only a few spells can affect the will-o-wisp indicates that those spells somehow disrupt either the will-o-wisp's lattice on this plane or the will-o-wisp's energy pipeline to the Negative Material Plane. The fact that any material weapon can harm the will-o-wisp — albeit with difficulty — shows that physical interference with the will-o-wisp's lattice can possibly disrupt it. (The unlikely nature of this event is reflected in the will-o-wisp's very good armor class. It may actually be easy to contact a will-o-wisp with a weapon, but the chance of landing a blow that causes damage is low.)

5. As well as allowing communication with other intelligent creatures, this innate telepathy grants the boggart its *confusion* powers. The *confusion* is not a direct result of the noise a boggart makes; the noise is merely a focus for the effect (which explains why stoppering the ears does no good). The *confusion* is actually caused through telepathy: a direct muddling of the mind. Such spells, devices, and the like that shield against telepathy are also effective against a boggart's *confusion* attack.

It is worth noting that the will-o-wisp's telepathy will inform it if an attempt to lure prey to its doom is working or not. If it is not (if, for example, the prospective victim suspects the nature of its foe), the will-o-wisp will often change tactics.

6. When the three will-o-wisps join together to reproduce, they do literally merge, intermingling their lattices and, for a moment, becoming one. During that moment each shares with both others its entire store of knowledge and memories: everything it knows, each of the others comes to know. While so merged, the three-in-one will-o-wisp possesses the sum of all three will-o-wisps' hit points.

While merged, the will-o-wisps construct the lattice that will become the boggart. This lattice contains that information that would, in a regular creature, be labeled instinct, but does not include specific memories possessed by the parents. When the lattice is formed, the will-o-wisps draw upon their own energy stores, and upon the Negative Material Plane, to provide the energy necessary to produce a body for the boggart. While the great majority of this energy requirement is drawn from the Negative Material Plane, enough comes from the parent will-o-wisps to significantly weaken them: for the next 11-16 turns, all three are at half-normal hit points and are incapable of using their electrical powers.

7. The 10% chance of encountering 1-3 will-o-wisps as outlined in the *Monster Manual* represents the possibility of meeting some or all of a group that is about to engage in, or has just completed, mating. If more than one will-o-wisp is encountered, there is an additional 25% chance that 1-4 boggarts are also in the area. **65**

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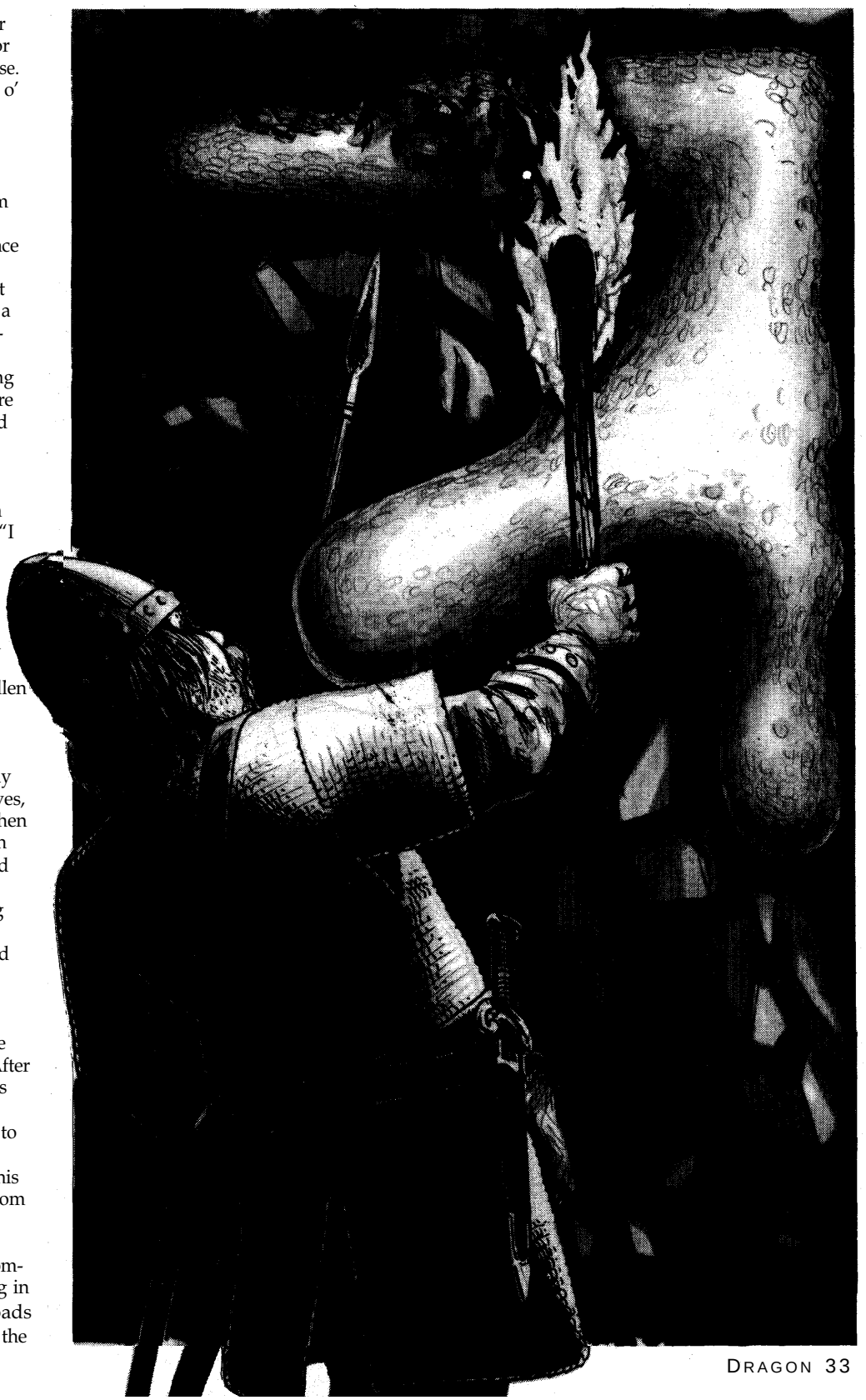
The ecology of the ochre jelly

by Ed Greenwood



"Old favourites' time, is it?" Elminster asked, draining his cocoa and reaching for his pipe simultaneously with practiced ease. "I know that ye folks that play at the sort o' things that happen for *real* in the Realms are overly fond of pitting yer characters against witless giant amoebas! Just about their style, eh?"

I regarded him over the uplifted bottom of my mug. "Witless giant amoebas?" I asked, with the proper amount of deference in my tone.

"Ochre jellies, ye dolt!" Elminster shot back, expelling puffs of green smoke like a testy dragon. "Ye just asked about 'em — don't ye know anything to start with?"

"They're blobs, they ooze along looking for food — like adventurers — and they're always hungry," I offered. "I hoped you'd fill in the rest."

" 'Course ye did! 'Course ye did!" Elminster replied, drawing on his pipe. "And," he sighed (Ever see someone sigh while drawing on a pipe? Spectacular!), "I suppose — as usual — ye're right. Pay attention, then — and no questions, mind, till the tale's done."

I did as I was told, and Elminster related the tale of "How Grymmar Held the Pass":

"Now, in the days when the Sea of Fallen Stars was new to men, and the lands still wild and unsettled, bands of lawless men rose about scavenging and slaying and pillaging. Kings were hard put to it to pay and train fighting-men to guard themselves, to say nothing of their kingdoms. And when a king rode to war, it was likely to be with another king, over some insult or spurned daughter or an uncertain line on a map. Kings did not spend time or men chasing after a few brigands who would flee and leave traps behind, or set an ambush, and in the end melt away before searchers as though they had never been — until the searchers turned their backs, of course.

"The King of Cormyr was one of these monarchs, and a man with a problem. After spending a hot summer fighting all across his realm, from the Wyvernwater to Eveningstar, he had few men indeed left to call the Royal Host of Cormyr — some sixty-five stouthearts, to be exact. Then his weary ears heard news of an incursion from the east into Arabel, a merchant city too precious to give up without a fight.

"This was bad enough in itself, but compounding his plight were local cries rising in Eveningstar about bandits on the roads and a huge brigand army somewhere in the

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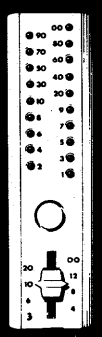

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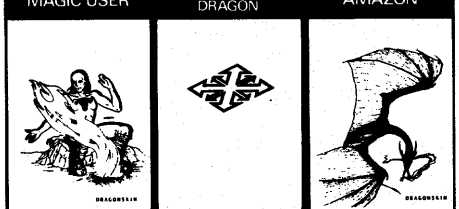

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mountains to the west. Nowadays, with the great fortress of High Horn looming over the west pass, such news would be of little concern. But in these early days of Cormyr's sovereignty, no such fortress existed to impede the progress of enemies from the west. Clearly, the king's men could not be in both places at once, and dividing the force could mean failure for both halves. But the king dared not disregard either threat. He called his men together to give them the facts of the matter and told them to be ready to travel the following day.

"Later that evening the king called for Grymmar, the oldest of his stalwarts, and asked for the grizzled lieutenant's counsel on how to divide soldiery and supplies so as to meet each threat. The king was surprised to hear that Grymmar had formulated a plan to deal with the brigands — a plan for which no soldiers would be needed, save Grymmar himself and a couple of strong men. The monarch gave his approval to the plan and his blessing to Grymmar, supplying him with documents that would enable him to acquire the goods and services he would need, and on the morrow the king led his army eastward.

"Grymmar spent part of this first day gathering supplies. With the king's authority to lend weight to his requests, he procured an unused stone coffin, placed within it three grunting and squealing pigs, and with the aid of his strong assistants loaded it into a cart along with a barrel of pitch and several torches. Then Grymmar and his curious entourage set out — not directly for the pass, but on a northerly route to a place not far from Eveningstar.

"Only days earlier, some of the king's men had cleaned out this place, an old dwarf-delve that had served as a hiding place for a group of bandits. A dozen ruffians there were in all, no trouble — but Grymmar and the others with him had all taken a fright when, as they leaned on their swords afterward in a deep and freshly bloodied chamber, something moving and shapeless and alive, ochre in color and horribly hungry in motion, had oozed in under the door.

" 'A flesh-eater! ' one of the warriors had warned, and they all had backed away hastily as the jellylike thing advanced. It flowed over stone and corpse alike, and left only bones and metal in its wake. The soldiers circled toward the exit, rushed through the doorway, slammed the portal, and sealed the space between door and floor with loose dirt.

"Now Grymmar made a return visit to the bandit hold, and with the help of his companions transported the contents of the cart down into the chamber where the flesh-eater was last seen. The coffin was set out, its lid awry, and the men sat nearby inside a circle of pitch they had smeared on the floor. Fairly soon the flesh-eater appeared, attracted by their presence, flowing eerily along a wall. Grymmar set the ring of pitch aflame, and the jelly shrank away from the men and went for the pigs in the coffin. When the thing was entirely inside the coffin, the men leapt forward, put the lid back in place, and sealed the container with more of the pitch. Then they carried the coffin back to the cart. Grymmar and one of his helpers headed directly for High Horn Pass, and the other man veered toward the druids' grove in the forest to the south and east of the pass.

"By the time Grymmar reached the pass at sunset of the following day, he could see the bandits in the distance, approaching from the other direction. He and his cohort unloaded the coffin, storing it under a ledge where it would not be detected in the darkness, and watched from an elevated hiding place as the brigands made camp in the pass itself — an expanse of land broad and flat enough to house all of their tents at once, although they had to keep rather close quarters.

"Then the druids arrived in the dark of night, responding to the summons of their king as conveyed by Grymmar's helper, and it was time to put the last stage of the plan into action. Grymmar crept back down to the coffin, scraped away the pitch, and loosened the lid. At the same time, the druids began their enchantments. Massive, threatening clouds formed in the sky above the pass, and before too long the air was rent with driving rain, booming thunder, and crackling bolts of lightning. The bandits were protected from the elements inside their tents, and they slept unafraid, but tent-cloth could not keep them safe from the real danger.

"To this day, some folk still tell of how the druids saved Eveningstar by bringing down the awesome storm that decimated the brigand army and forced the survivors to turn back. But others know better, for they have heard the real tale. The storm abated after a time, and at first light the next morning when Grymmar and the druids looked down upon the bandits' campsite, they saw scores of flesh-eaters — born of the lightning strikes — and dozens of corpses, many of them already nothing more than skeletons. The few bandits fortunate enough to escape death from the jellies now could see the carnage that had been wrought during the night, and they ran for their lives back the way they had come. . . .

". . . And that was how Grymmar held the pass."

At this point Elminster sat back and reignited his pipe, satisfied with the way he had told the story. I thanked him — and indeed it was a good tale — and then set about quizzing him as to the practical (to adventurers) details of the ochre jelly. Elminster related the following information, much of it drawn from the *Bestiary* of Hlammech the Naturalist:

An ochre jelly is amorphous in form, having an outer elastic "skin" or bag of tough, translucent cells, ochre in color. Inside the skin is a large mass of fluid — the main bulk of the creature. This fluid is thick, soupy stuff — stabbing an ochre jelly

won't cause the stuff to drain away quickly, like the way a wineskin loses its contents if punctured; fluid will ooze from the wound until excess skin cells (produced from the cellulose the creature devours, and carried around in little globules inside the fluid) arrive to "patch the leak." In this fashion, an ochre jelly can heal any wound it suffers from an edged weapon within 5-12 rounds (d8 + 4). A wound from a blunt weapon is more traumatic, rupturing a greater number of skin cells and taking 11-20 (d10 + 10) turns to close. In either case, the hit points lost when the wound was suffered are regained when it is healed.

Because of its construction, an ochre jelly can squeeze through any crack large enough to permit a thin "wafer" of skin cells (both sides) and internal fluids to pass — about an inch in width is required for an average-sized jelly. The creature's movement rate is only 1" when it compresses itself to travel through an opening smaller than the jelly's normal thickness. When at rest and under normal conditions, an average-sized ochre jelly is 3 to 6 inches thick and occupies a surface area equivalent to a 6' -diameter circle; however, the term "at rest" is theoretical in this case, because an ochre jelly never stops moving except to devour prey. When it moves, it does so by extending one or more pseudopods of skin and fluid, becoming elongated in the direction of movement, and setting up a rippling motion that enables it to "slosh" forward by means of inertia.

Ochre jellies can adhere readily to walls, ceilings, glass, and so forth — they do not seem affected by water, wine, oil, grease, and the like, and have never been observed to slip — but their grip on surfaces is not strong enough to enable them to pull open chests, armor, closed doors, etc., and they can be readily scraped or shoved off of a surface by a creature of at least average strength.

The creatures are non-intelligent and have no visual organs as we know them. They can detect heat, vibrations, and the scents of organic substances, and will move in the direction from where these stimuli come (in the order given; ochre jellies apparently "prefer" live humans or animals as prey, but can "smell" wood or plant growth, or corpses, if no live creatures are in the vicinity). They can sense the heat of a torch flame at a range of 500 feet, and the body heat of a living animal from 100 feet away; their sensitivity to vibrations (such as those caused by footsteps) or scents has a range of at least 500 feet, and often much farther depending on the severity of the vibration or the intensity of the odor; for instance, an ochre jelly can detect a troglodyte, by its scent, from several hundred yards away.

Ochre jellies will move mindlessly toward any stimulus, but will not voluntarily come into direct contact with any stimulus (such as a flame) that can damage them. In the absence of any detectable stimulus, an ochre jelly will continue to flow in the direction it is heading until forced to turn or double back on its path because of an obstacle; Grymmar and his companions were bound to eventually encounter the ochre jelly in the closed-off chamber, because the creature had nowhere else to go.

When an ochre jelly comes into contact with any consumable (i.e., living or once-living) substance, a number of one-way valves in the creature's skin surface will open, and globules of the corrosive digestive fluid inside will be expelled onto the prey. This fluid seems to be a sort of acid-based enzyme which first eats away and then breaks down (by chemical reaction) the flesh or cellulose. The ochre jelly then reabsorbs the digestive fluid at the same time that it ingests the nutrients, through a set of similar one-way valves that work in the opposite direction. These valves are very selective, only letting in the fluids that the ochre jelly "intends" to absorb; the creatures have been encountered in coastal salt waters, and in order to subsist in such an environment, they must be able to prevent the taking in the water with which they are surrounded.

As so often happens with the unique body fluids of certain mysterious creatures, the acid-enzyme secreted by an ochre jelly becomes inert if the creature is killed or the fluid is somehow prevented from being reabsorbed by the body. This neutralization of the fluid takes place immediately upon the death of an ochre jelly, or if the creature is forced to abandon partially consumed prey (which is why a victim's flesh does not continue to "dissolve" if the jelly is killed or pushed off). Similarly, the skin of an ochre jelly loses its distinctive properties after the creature is killed and cannot be salvaged for any useful purpose.

An ochre jelly can and will instinctively flow over or around its prey, enveloping it so as to retain contact if the target moves or struggles. If the creature is attached to a wall or a ceiling, it can send out pseudopods to contact something edible that is below or beside it. Once having made contact in this fashion, the jelly can detach itself from the wall or ceiling and flow onto the victim.

An ochre jelly can be damaged by cold- or fire-based attacks. Severe cold (freezing temperature or lower) of a lasting nature will further impair the creature, slowing its movement rate to 2" and adding 2-5 rounds to the time required for it to heal a wound, since its internal fluids cannot flow as freely to reach the affected area. (Note that a *cone of cold* spell, to name one example, is not cold "of a lasting nature," since the spell's duration is instantaneous.) Any single fire-based attack that does damage equal to at least one-quarter of the creature's maximum hit points will cause a wound that takes 16-25 (d10 + 15) rounds to heal, and for 4-7 rounds following the attack the ochre jelly will lose 3 hit points per round as fluid continues to leak from the wound. Fire damage of less severity will take 11-20 rounds to heal, the same as for a blow with a blunt weapon.

The sudden application of intense electrical energy (such as a lightning bolt or magical or natural origin) does not damage an ochre jelly; instead, this serves to increase the creature's metabolism and cause it to divide immediately (within the round following the electrical contact) into a number of smaller jellies, each identical to the original creature in all respects except for size and damage; they are capable of doing 2-6 (d4 + d2) points of damage per attack. The number of "offspring" created is usually (75%) 2-4, but occasionally as many as 5-8 are produced. These smaller jellies will grow into normal-sized creatures (doing the usual 3-12 points of damage) within 1-3 months after the split occurred.

In rare instances, an ochre jelly will split "voluntarily" into two equal-sized creatures (each doing normal damage), but only when the original creature is of huge size. Ochre jellies grow slightly every time they feed, but do not shrink when they go without food — and they can survive for several weeks on little or no nourishment. No example is known of an ochre jelly that died of "old age"; perhaps they do not age (as we understand the term), or perhaps they decompose quickly when they die in this manner, thus leaving no evidence of their passing.

An ochre jelly cannot be poisoned or intoxicated or otherwise adversely affected by attacks with *purely* fluids (including acid but not including flaming oil). It will absorb all such fluids, "walling" them into globules surrounded by excess skin cells, suspending them within its internal body fluid, and holding them harmlessly until it is not feeding on prey or involved in combat, whereupon it will expel them through the same openings that release its digestive fluid. A physical attack upon a jelly that ruptures a globule of this stored fluid may cause its contents to squirt out at the attacker.

Astute students of biology will note that ochre jellies are not precisely "amoebas" as we know them — but when I mentioned this to Elminster, he merely fixed me with a cold eye and grunted, "Hah! And what do your scientists in this world know of *anything?"* And that is all I learned from him about the ochre jelly.

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The ecology of the maedar

Medusa's male counterpart does what she doesn't

by Ed Greenwood

The hearthfire flickered in the tavern known as The Leaning Post. The evening was old, and the few tipplers left in the taproom were crouched close around the fire. Tongues were wagging with tales of fell keeps and grim adventures, and monsters most strange. Old Urvan, a grizzled warrior of scars and reputation most grim, rubbed his bald pate and disagreed with a younger man.

"Nay," he rumbled, wagging a cold grey eye, "men die like cattle, for all their armor; I've fought a dozen, on horseback, and slain them all, and me a lone man with but my fists. But the woman-monster, the medusa, the maiden who turns ye to stone, is far the worse."

From his dark corner, Elminster coughed. "Oh? Think ye so?" he said casually. Everyone fell silent at the sage's words. He spoke seldom, but his tales were not soon forgotten. Old Urvan fixed the sage with a colder grey eye and emitted a grunt that urged Elminster to speak.

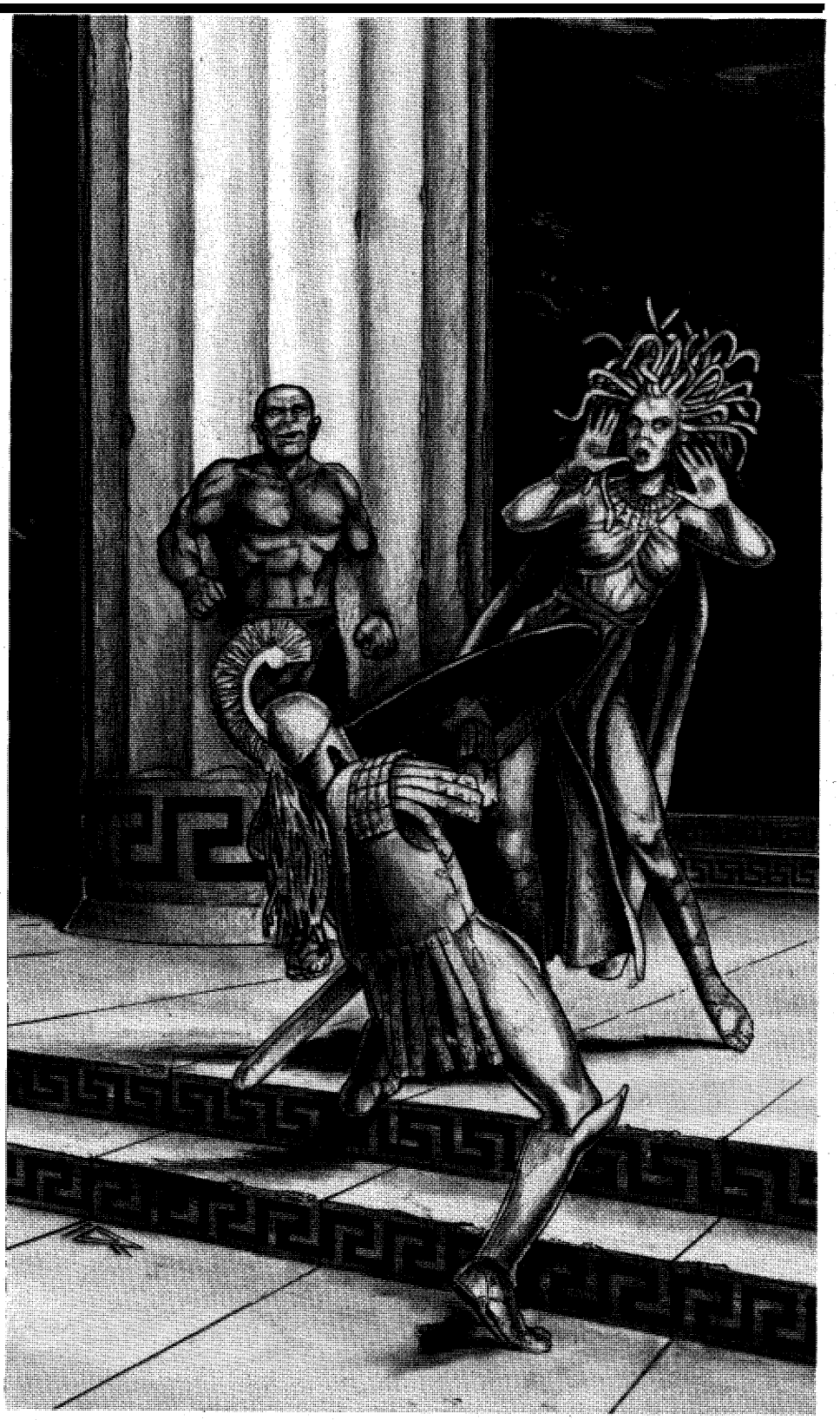
"The medusa is a fearsome thing, true," Elminster said slowly, looking around the firelit circle of faces. "But as bad or worse is the male, the stealer-through-stone, the maedar. Medusae, ye see, have mates. An' they're by far the deadlier sex. . . ."

Elminster then unburdened himself of the tale of Ilguld the illusionist and the Walking Stone of Yarech. It is a long tale, full of mimes and bawdy jests and local jokes, and unless one is the raconteur Elminster is, 'tis better to paraphrase, thus:

Ilguld was an adventurer, the youngest and least powerful of a proud and reckless band who rode out of Waterdeep often, combing the caverns of the wild North. On one jaunt, the group met a medusa, whose gaze turned two brawny warriors to unmoving stone. The survivors withdrew hastily and thought of a plan. Ilguld had with him a small mirror, and this he tied across his eyes so that, peering down, he could see only the ground before his toes. He covered himself in his storm cloak, the cowl thrown forward to conceal his face.

Thus prepared, Ilguld advanced into the monster's lair, shuffling like an old man and leaning on a staff. The medusa rushed him to bite and slay. As he tried to fend her off with his staff, she tore open his cowl — and, gazing into the mirror, turned herself to stone while she still clutched him.[1]

Ilguld tugged himself free of the stony grasp, ran from the lair, and called his comrades out of hiding. They rushed forward heedlessly to seek the medusa's trea-



sure, waving aside Ilguld's stammered warnings, and were soon deep within the maze of small caverns that made up the medusa's lair. Ilguld followed more cautiously, and was scared badly when he saw his comrades at the other end of a long cavern — coming back toward him as fast as they could run with their bags of coins and coffers of gems. The illusionist noticed immediately that two of the band were missing. As he watched, a part of the wall seemed to move, reaching out to fell the rearmost adventurer. At that, Ilguld cast a spell of invisibility on himself and fled until he was just inside the entrance to the lair.

Seconds later he again heard the weapon-clanking and curses of his comrades. They had dropped their treasure and were running hard. The men, now without two more of their number, burst past him and out of the cave. Ilguld remained frozen as he beheld what had chased them out — a muscular, bald-headed man clad only in breeches, who came behind the group at a fast trot[2].

Ilguld dared to leave the cave entrance after this strange man passed, taking care not to stumble or make undue noise. He turned in the direction his friends had gone, and just ahead he saw them — statues, all, frozen forever in the midst of their flight. Beyond the statues stood the medusa, stone no more, her arms raised in triumph.[3]

As he watched the bald man approach the medusa, Ilguld realized that she must have somehow been restored to life and had left the lair by another route so as to lie in wait for the intruders to exit. The medusa and the man embraced, and she spoke to him in loving tones.[4] Ilguld was amazed again by what happened next. He saw the man shatter the stone form of his fellow mage and then touch some of the fragments, which turned from stone rubble to bloody flesh. The bald man and his mate, the medusa, sat down to eat as Ilguld tore his gaze away from the scene and stole away as softly as he could.

"A likely story," Urvan scoffed. "One man, weaponless, defeating an entire band?"

"Why, Urvan," Elminster replied mildly, lifting his tankard, "I hear from your own lips that such a feat — defeating a dozen armed men, and their horses too — is easy, if one has but the use of both fists. Is it then not so?"

"Phauugh," Urvan replied eloquently.

Notes

1. The gaze of a medusa can turn itself or any other medusa to stone. Such petrification is permanent unless reversed by spell or special ability (see note 3 below).

2. Maedar are the male counterparts of the medusae. (Singular and plural forms of "maedar" are the same; the name can be used to refer to both genders collectively, or to the male alone. The latter usage is employed in this text.) The maedar are far rarer and more reclusive than their mates, and are seldom seen. Many men do not even know, or believe, that they exist. They dwell in the depths of caverns, guarding the pair's hoard of treasure (and food) while their mates hunt.

Maedar appear as bald-headed (in fact, completely hairless) muscular human males. In all statistics they are identical to medusae, except that they have two attacks per round, doing 2-8 points of damage with each blow of their mighty fists. Maedar cannot petrify other creatures and are themselves immune to petrification and paralyzation (including related magics such as *slow* and *hold* spells) from any source whatsoever, although they can be confined by *webs, forcecages,* and the like.

3. Maedar have the ability to turn *stone to flesh* by touch, once every three turns. Thus, one can free a medusa who has gaze-trapped herself to stone — or, by smashing petrified prey to rubble and then turning it to stone, gain an easy meal for himself and his mate from a creature petrified earlier by the medusa. Like medusae, maedar can see into the Astral Plane and the Ethereal Plane, and they can use their *stone to flesh* ability into those planes as well.

Maedar possess the ability to *pass through stone* as xorn and xaren do, at normal movement rate. A maedar requires one round of concentration to adjust his molecular structure before entering rock and after leaving it again; no other activity may be undertaken during this round. If struck by a *phase door* spell while *passing through stone,* a maedar is killed. If a mated maedar and medusa are confronted by a stronger creature in their lair, the male will abandon the female to her fate without hesitation, escaping through the rock walls of the cavern. However, a maedar will never neglect to unpetrify a medusa when it is safe to do so.

The treasure of a medusa and maedar is usually concealed (behind loose stones, in crevices, etc.) in addition to being guarded by the maedar. The males monitor the treasure continuously and frequently move it from place to place within the lair, particularly to discourage thievery by other creatures able to pass through stone. Males and females alike will flee from strong attackers, abandoning whatever treasure they cannot carry, rather than defend a hoard to the death. The treasure hoard of a medusa and maedar will almost always contain a selection of feminine garb that doubles as the medusa's wardrobe.

4. All maedar and medusae speak and understand the language of lawful evil, the common tongue, and any other languages spoken often by creatures in the vicinity. Details of the courtship of a mated pair are unknown, but they do pair for life (one choosing another partner only if a mate is slain), and live and hunt together at all times. The female produces 1-3 live young every 10 years or so. Young have the same abilities as their parents, but no physical attacks and only 1-2 HD. (A young female can petrify, and a young male can *pass through stone* and turn *stone to flesh;* however, the asplike, poisonous "hair" growth of a medusa develops only in maturity, and young maedar lack the strength for damaging blows.) Offspring gradually gain hit dice as they approach maturity and adulthood, a process that typically takes four or five years. When they reach maturity and gain the ability to physically attack, the young are roughly encouraged to strike out on their own; no more than one adult medusa and one adult maedar will ever be found in the same lair. If a medusa is slain but her mate survives, the male will search tirelessly for the killer(s) to take revenge, sometimes pursuing such quarry for years. A maedar can track as a ranger does, but this does not include the ability to follow the trail of a creature that has passed through stone. All maedar and medusae are immune to the poison of (their own and other) medusa hair growths.

Medusae and maedar respect, but do not worship, Skoraeus the Living Rock (see *Legends & Lore,* Nonhuman Deities), and have a like attitude toward lawful evil deities and creatures. They will cooperate with lawful evil creatures such as orcs, kobolds, or even devils, for reward or security or (rarely) under duress. If forced to aid or serve another, they will always seek revenge. Meader and medusae cannot be trusted by other creature except of their ilk. Occasionally they will bargain with, or purchase information or services with, their treasure.

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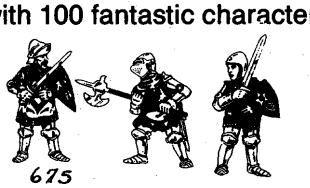

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The ecology of the

SEA LION

by Ed Greenwood

"What's this I hear about sea lions in the Realms being, ah, really some sort of aquatic lion?" I asked, as Elminster paused on the heels of a few rollicking tales of the deeps. The old sage blinked.

"Aye. . . . What other sorts of sea lions are there?" he asked suspiciously, no doubt thinking this would turn out to be another of my jokes.

I told him that seals in our world were called sea lions by some, and he snorted. "Why not just call them seals?" he asked, as though everyone in our world was crazy. (He could, I often think, be right.)

"Well," I continued, "are these sea lions — which we don't have here, by the way — important? I mean, in fable, land-lore, monster-slaying stories; that sort of thing."

The old sage thought for a bit and then nodded. "Ye remember the arms of Tethyr that I showed ye some time ago?" I did, and recalled aloud (as I pulled Elminster's sketch from my files) that there were sea lions in that coat of arms. Elminster nodded again.

"I'll tell ye," he said slowly, "the tale of Nearel and the sea lions." He coughed a few times and began sonorously.

"Of old in the land of Tethyr, there was a king, Mhoaran the Tusk-Bearded. A mighty man was he, tall and broad and thewed as a great hero — and coarse, fire-tempered, and brawling, to boot. He took his thronw by force of arms and held it for many long years despite the rebellious nobles of the land, who supported three surviving (and well hidden) kin of the previous monarch. These nobles managed to slay, usually by poison, any heirs Mhoaran fathered, until there was not a one of the nobles whom Mhoaran would trust. Moreover, three successive queens died mysteriously, and the lonely and bereaved king grew bitter, grim, and wild.

"He took to spiriting his sons away from their birth-beds and riding far from his court, offering lands, riches, and noble titles to commoners who would raise him an heir in secret. Many families accepted — but the king's enemies had agents, too, and these agents almost always found and slew both the royal infants and their foster parents. In all the long years, Mhoaran lost twenty-six sons and himself grew more feeble as, despite his precautions, occasional poisons did their work on him.

"Only two of his sons are known to have survived past childhood. One's lineage was suspected, and he was slain in combat while but an untried youth. The other one, Nearel, grew up in a fisherman's hut on the Sword Coast, where he helped his foster father with fishing — and with the capturing and taming of sea lions, which was the man's special interest.

"It happened that about fourteen years after Nearel's birth, King Mhoaran took ship north up the coast to Waterdeep, to meet with other rulers of the Realms. Fearing an attack, the king kept his vessel close to shore, slipping along by night and remaining, in safe harbors by day. Mhoaran's enemies were closer than the king had thought, and he was roused one night by the clash of steel outside his cabin door.

"Now, Mhoaran was a bull of a man, a fighter of awesome repute, even in the elder days of his reign. But he was only one, with his bodyguards dead beyond his door, and he faced nearly forty. He stood his ground in silence, in his darkened cabin, and answered not their taunts and threats, for he knew arrows would be his sure death if he opened the door or let light reveal him.

"With blade and axe he waited — and fell like a demon on those who picked his door-lock and slunk in. Lit torches were hurled into the cabin by those in the passage. Mhoaran wielded them like blazing clubs and one by one hurled them out the sea-windows of his cabin as he fought — until he stood again in darkness, surrounded by dead men: The king then piled corpses in the doorway, so that the light would not locate him clearly, and waited.

"Again the traitors charged in to slay the king; again he fought, and was sorely — wounded, but battled on in deadly silence, until the last of this group of attackers turned and fled. Mhoaran heard much heated discussion from the passage outside his chamber as the king tied garments on the worst of his wounds, but bled through the bandages, and grew weaker. He heard the traitors decide to burn him out, and he knew that they would in the end succeed. Quickly, before someone thought to send archers to the rails to loose shafts at him as he swam, Mhoaran slipped out through a sea-window and made for shore.

"The water was icy cold, and the king very weak. The weapons he bore dragged at him as he swam, and he was heard from the ship. Mhoaran spat silent curses at the waning moon, for it still cast a feeble light over the waves, and shafts began to hiss into the water near him. The shore was far off, and the king despaired — for he could hear a boat being launched, behind him, and when he swam on he saw in the moonlight another small boat ahead of him.

"For a moment he thought this second boat was someone sent out from shore to slay him, by some treacherous arrangement. But as it drew nearer he saw that it held only one man — a youth, and weaponless. The youth saw him and said, 'Who art thou? Cast away thy weapons and I will take thee in the boat.'

"Mhoaran was loath to let go his weapons, but his strength was nearly gone anyway, so he complied, giving his name but not his title. The youth took him aboard, rolling him into the bottom of the boat atop bulging sacks that reeked of fresh-slain cattle. The youth saw the small boat hastening toward them from the king's ship and said to Mhoaran, 'Who are these that would slay you?'

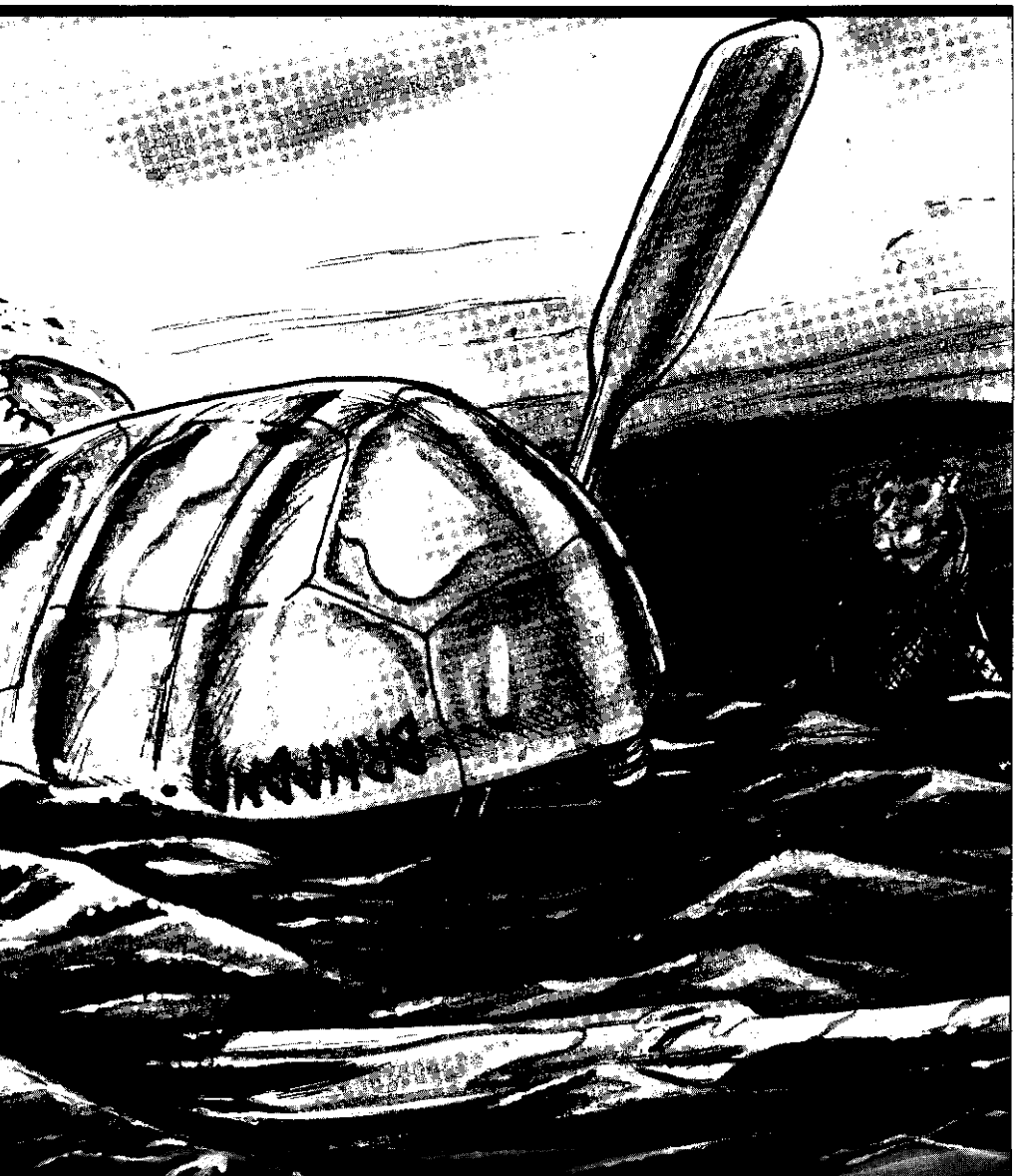
" 'Traitors,' Mhoaran answered.

" 'Traitors?' echoed the youth. 'To the king?'

"Mhoaran admitted his full identity, and the youth did not seem overly awed. 'If I save thee,' he asked, 'may I come to court? For I would be a swordsman.'

" 'Aye,' Mhoaran said. 'I can promise that. Wilt thou tell me thy name?'

" 'I am called Nearel,' the youth answered, and straightaway he leaned over the side of the boat while holding in his hand a short, flaring horn or trumpet carved of wood. He plunged his head into the icy waves and blew the horn, which made a deep, roaring noise. Nearel straightened up and turned, dripping, and warned, 'Stay away from the water,' as he untied a sack.



"Suddenly, the water around them boiled, and the king saw a huge curve of scales, dripping claws of fearsome size, and then one — two — four leonine heads rising out of the depths around them. Nearel raised the horn again and winded a deep, roaring bellow. This signal ended in a cough, and there came answering coughs and growls from the waves about them.

As an arrow slashed into the water nearby, Mhoaran realized that the boat crowded with swordsmen had drawn very close. Nearel stood up, hurled the contents of a sack toward the other boat, and roared again, this time in a high voice. Then, as Nearel ducked low to avoid flying arrows, Mhoaran saw the sea-creatures turn in the water and charge at the pursuing boat, trailing wakes like many small ships. In a moment there was a muffled crash, and then the full-throated roars of lions were heard in the darkness. Mhoaran made out the shape of the boat as it rolled over, and he heard the thrashing of men in the water, punctuated by an occasional scream. The lions dined, and all of the armed company perished, leaving the king and Nearel alone on the waves.

"Faint roaring could be heard beneath them, and the sea lions came up to the surface again, huge and fearsome. 'They yet want their dinner,' Nearel said, and began emptying sacks overboard. The king helped him until their boat was empty of meat, and deep purring was heard from all about. Then Nearel turned the boat about and rowed to shore. When Mhoaran laid eyes on Nearel's father, the king knew that he had found his own son.

"When Nearel came to court, he came by sea, standing on the backs of two sea lions. In later years Nearel fed his sea lions from the windows of his own tower, for the royal castle stands on a rock isle in a salt-water lake. And that is how the arms of Tethyr came to be supported by two sea lions."

We talked on late into the night, and hereafter follows what details of these creatures I could glean from Elminster.

Sea lions are large, powerful predators that inhabit undersea lairs (sometimes large wrecks in calm waters, but more often caves or rock clefts). They will move to another area if food becomes scarce or other predators too aggressive, persistent, and numerous. Sea lions are afraid of nothing, but they are inclined to be indolent — and thus, efficient killers and creatures who have no taste for fighting over food when it can be had elsewhere with less effort,

In a family or as a loner, a sea lion will hunt in a familiar area and rarely stray from it. The creatures are seldom a danger to humankind, demi-humans, or humanoids except in cases where they view individuals of such races as prey — a lone swimmer, for instance, or a small group of pearl divers.

Sea lions are useful, if tamed and properly trained, as aquatic guardians or hunters (sometimes for sport, as in the

island kingdom of Nimbral). Minstrels and bards sometimes refer to female sea lions (or, more carelessly, all sea lions) as "lyonesses"; hence the expression "like a merman riding a lyonesse," said of someone who sits unconcernedly in a sinking ship, or a vessel adrift. Many undersea creatures have been known to train sea lions; any such arrangement will suit the beasts because it enables them to live relatively free of pain and danger, and obtain, food more often and more easily than in the wild, so long as the sea lions get exercise and a chance to hunt for themselves fairly often.

Many men along the Sword Coast have trained sea lions, intending to sell the tamed specimens or to use them in salvage, fishing, and sea warfare. By the use of rewards (of food) and punishment (withholding food, expressing displeasure vocally), patient trainers can slowly steer a young sea lion's behavior toward more acceptable habits. However, adult sea lions can never be so trained by surface-dwellers; full-grown specimens will seek to slay any captor at every opportunity, heedless of their own safety.

Young sea lions will occasionally rebel in training; if they can be physically bested by the trainer (bad or lazy trainers clip a sea lion's ears to break its spirit), no harm will be done to the training process. If, however, the young creatures learn that they can defy their trainer with impunity, or prove often rebellious, they are unfit for training and should be released into the wild.

Few sages have examined sea lions, and fewer still observed them in the wild, but here follows what factual material Elminster has gathered:

Sea lions are robust, healthy creatures who usually die in combat; they rarely become diseased. Both sexes have manes, similar coloring, and scales over their entire body surface except for the head area. Their flipperlike forelimbs end in sets of claws (not retractile) that can do more damage than the strikes of a lion. Likewise, the bite of its strong jaws is more dangerous than the bite of a lion, A sea lion propels itself through the water by "rowing" with its forelimbs and sweeping its fluked tail back and forth. A system of gills enables sea lions to take in oxygen when underwater, but they can also inhale air as a lion does, which enables them to travel on the surface of the water for relatively short periods.

If healthy, sea lions mate every 9 months or so, the female giving birth 7-8 months later to 1-3 live, fully mobile offspring. Young sea lions are AC 8/6 when born (their scales are still flexible and soft), have 2 HD, move 14", and do damage of 1-3/1-3/1-8. Such young cubs are watched at all times by the mother (or, if in a family pride, 1-2 females) and kept in the lair, where they are fed by other members of the family that bring home their kills.

If the hunting is good, the young will grow rapidly; by 3-4 weeks of age, they will be AC 6/4, move 18", with attacks for 1-4/1-4/2-8 damage. For the rest of the first year of their lives, they remain at about this size, growing and developing internally. They learn to hunt during this time, always under the watchful eye of an adult female. The guardian keeps the young within a half-mile of the lair, nipping and roaring at cubs who do not want to be herded where she wishes them to go. In the following two years of life, sea lions begin to hunt alone (tentatively and carefully rather than boldly), and are identical to adults except that they have only 5 HD, gaining the sixth in the fourth year of their existence.

Most sea lions die violently and at a fairly young age, but some have been known to live more than eighty winters. The muzzle of a sea lion grows gray with age.

Sea lions usually live in family groups, known as prides, made up of 1 mature male, 1-2 young males, 2-4 mature females, and 1-3 young females. Old females will be cared for by the family until they die; old males usually die in battle. A young male either defeats the head of a pride to take his place, or is driven out to hunt alone until he can take or build a pride of his own.

Hunting packs may be a family pride (35% chance), but are more often (65%) adult males, sometimes accompanied by adult females or young males, who have gathered together under a strong leader to take on strong foes (such as sharks).

Adults will drag prey to their lair when it is unsafe or imprudent to eat where the prey was killed, or to feed young, but will not do this if it would reveal the location of the lair to a powerful foe. If a sea lion is hunting and there is more than one prey to be had immediately (when a group of whales is encountered, for instance), it will often try to disable a victim and then turn to fight others, rather than finishing off the kill. Thus, young sea lions in the second and third stages of growth sometimes hang about the edges of a battle, waiting to dart in and drag away disabled prey while the adults continue to fight off the more healthy foes. Sea lions never slay wastefully; they will kill enough to feed themselves (and their trainer or family, if any) and no more. Of course, one will fight incessantly if it is threatened by a group of adversaries and escape is difficult or impossible. Sea lions are intelligent enough to usually be able to sense when an enemy might be too powerful for them, and can certainly tell when a combat or battle is going badly, and will not hesitate to flee (if possible) under such circumstances.

The lairs of sea lions contain all manner of treasure that is not destroyed by water, usually including a great variety of small metallic litter — chiefly coins, but also many items of no appreciable value. Sea lions do not consider their treasure valuable, land will not fight to the death to defend it or their lair, although they will usually try to drive away any creatures approaching their lair in order to establish their territorial rights. ✕

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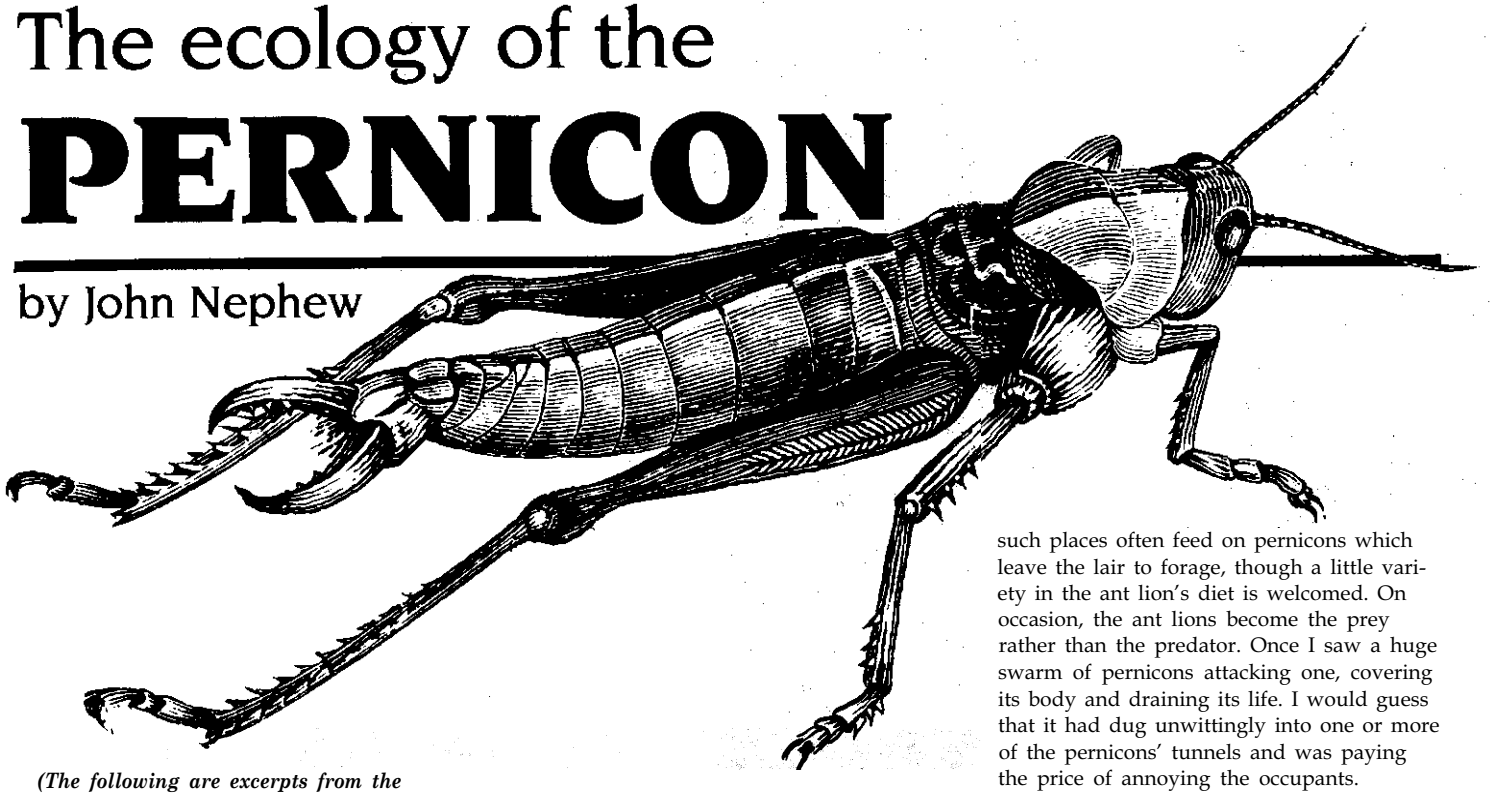
The ecology of the PERNICON

by John Nephew



(The following are excerpts from the diaries of the Emir of Yandark, later High Sultan of Kiralsh, Jesouhd Ye'esif.)

During my recent visit to the eminent Colonel Endrivan of Olcoran, once an adventuring companion of mine and always a friend, he expressed some interest in a creature he had heard lived in the Iriahb Desert of my homeland. This creature, the insect known as the pernicon, captured his interest for the water-divining powers which have made it known. We discussed the topic for some time, since I have had some experience with the creature in my desert travels. It seems to me that little is commonly known about the pernicon, and many "facts" about it have been distorted. Since visiting with the colonel, I have taken some interest in the particulars of the creature and learned what new things I could of it. I record here that which I have learned, and hope the knowledge will be of use to the desert traveler and naturalist, and of interest to others.

The pernicon is in basic form similar to a locust, or grasshopper, of about two inches in length. There are several points that distinguish it from its smaller cousins. Coloration is vastly different, with red, yellow, ochre, and blue being common, as well as some rarer shades among those, such as orange-yellow or greenish-yellow. Another difference I have seen is that the pernicon lacks wings — it is a crawler and jumper.[1]

The pernicon lives in the outer reaches of deserts, probably so that it has a supply of vegetable matter available for consumption when there is a lack of animal life[2]; again, unlike the grasshoppers and locusts, it is truly an omnivore. The creature feeds on animals by jumping on them and clenching exposed flesh (or soft body parts, in the case of some creatures) with pincers at the rear of its abdomen. Through this, the insect drains the fluids of the victim — and often its life.[3]

The pincers continue to siphon out one's endurance even if the insect is slain, and removal of the pincers is a delicate and painful task. [4]

Though they are small and weak, the trouble in killing pernicons lies in ***hitting*** them, because of their size and swift hopping. Always beware those pincers; a pernicon dodging your blow may at the same time be launching its own attack. Of course, a pernicon that is attached to you makes a much easier target.[5]

One seeking these creatures should hope to find a small foraging group of pernicons, rather than the thousands that infest a lair. Though one or two cause little trouble to anyone with fighting experience, a large group poses a threat even to the most able of warriors.[6]

The lairs of the creature are found near the desert's edge[7], as mentioned before, near their plant and animal food supplies. A lair almost resembles a town, being made of many mounds resembling large anthills raised from the sand.

I caution the reader to remember that they are ***hills,*** with burrow entrances. Make sure that they are just that; near many pernicon "towns" are the pits of ant lions, which are giant insects of greater power and aggressiveness. Those ant lions living in such places often feed on pernicons which leave the lair to forage, though a little variety in the ant lion's diet is welcomed. On occasion, the ant lions become the prey rather than the predator. Once I saw a huge swarm of pernicons attacking one, covering its body and draining its life. I would guess that it had dug unwittingly into one or more of the pernicons' tunnels and was paying the price of annoying the occupants.

This brings me to the mention of their tunnels. The burrows from the mounds go down at least six feet, to where the ground is more firm. It is here that the pernicons rest, breed, and spend much of their time. They dig long tunnels, each usually no more than half an inch high — which is ample space for the insects. I have heard from some men and women of the desert that the pernicons, by their water-detecting powers, tend to dig down where there is a supply of ground water. I would suppose then that in some places there would be tunnels going down a hundred feet or more! The learned sage Elkir Hildar of Ye'nassa told me that they need these humid "wells" to lay their eggs in, lest the eggs shrivel up and the young die before birth.[8]

After the pernicons have eaten all the food near their "town," they move on to another location, abandoning their old lair to seek a new place with more food. The entire colony moves at once — a great multicolored blanket moving across the land: crawling, jumping, devouring everything in their path until they find a suitable site for a new tunnel complex.[9] Hundreds die on the journey, but hundreds more live. They are the hated enemies of farmers and those who live off the fertile land. As they eat plants around their new "town" in great quantities, they enlarge the desert.

But just as the farmers loathe them, the nomads and travelers of the desert treasure them almost beyond gold. The antennae of the creature have a curious water-detecting power. When within two score yards of great amounts of water[10], the antennae vibrate and hum.

The creature's water-divining power has

been cause for much speculation and theorizing among sages. It does not seem to be magical in a strict sense; many bards consider a sunset magical, and augurs see magic power in the flight of birds and the entrails of beasts. This is, however, no place to argue the difference between "magical" and "natural." No magical power is required in the preservation process. Through the length of the antenna from outer tip to anchor is a clear, oily liquid. In the presence of the elements of earth and air it remains still, but water causes the fluid to become agitated, vibrating the antenna. Close contact with fire renders the liquid a brittle solid, which has no divinatory powers. The sage Carthin of Ethrenor speaks of each element having its own radiation (similar to the energy of the Positive and Negative material planes), and suggests that the antenna's content is sensitive to the radiations of the water element.[11]

Among many nomadic tribes, the pernicon antenna is a sacred religious object offered by some shamans to their deities for water.[12] To some desert cultures, the insect itself is sacred and is the symbol of deities. The ancestors of one nomadic tribe I know of sacrificed criminals to the pernicon swarms. It is ironic that while some hold the pernicon sacred for religious reasons, among other groups (most notably the royalty and very wealthy classes of my land) the pernicon is sacred for culinary reasons. There are several ways to prepare the insect, though always the antennae and pincers are removed. In my favorite recipe, the pernicons are fried in olive oil and served with salt and camel butter. Cooked properly, they are light, crispy and delicious; furthermore, they are a status symbol indicating great wealth. Attempts have been made to domesticate the creatures, but none yet successfully.

Despite being a culinary delicacy, even more valued are the creatures' antennae, as mentioned before. It is not easy to find them on the market. Near the eastern edge of the Iriahb Desert, in the city of Grindar, they are sold for considerable sums of money, but they are often improperly preserved (disintegrating in the buyer's hands moments after being purchased) or were not correctly removed from the creature (and thus are completely useless). In all likelihood, you will have to find and preserve the antennae yourself to ensure their quality.

The first problem, once you have found and slain the pernicon, is the careful removal of the antenna. The antennae have a bulbous portion not far below the outside of the skull. This anchors the antenna, but still allows it movement. There are tiny muscles in the anchoring chamber. With them, the antennae may be moved together or in different ways. This is helpful in finding the direction of water. One antenna is aimed one direction, and the other the opposite. The creature can detect the most minute difference in the frequency of vibration, and the antenna vibrating faster is closer to the water. Humans using an antenna have to move around, with the antenna indicating the direction of the source.

Beneath the "anchors," the very bases of the antennae are short, thin projections with rounded tips. Each tip touches a sensitive, rubbery tissue atop the creature's brain. This tissue detects the vibrations of the antennae (if any) and the direction it is aimed, and sends them to the brain, which can interpret the signals.

To correctly remove the antenna, the skull must be pulled apart to either side of the anchor, and the antenna cut free from the muscle tissue and removed. Most professionals use a special tool, a spring-tweezers, to remove the antenna; if these are not available, the next best things are some of the more delicate instruments found in most sets of thieves' too1s.[13]

Though small and delicate, an antenna lasts quite a while if you care for it well. If allowed to become damp, it disintegrates. It is by nature dry, and immersion in water causes it to explode harmlessly.

An antenna is also brittle, and crumbles to dust unless handled with utmost care. It is good to have it stored carefully and used only when necessary. The Bilndiah nomads have a simple but effective means of storing their antennae, which I use myself and recommend to all travelers. They use a bone map case, in which is placed a roll of camel hide (with plenty of cushioning fur) around the antenna. It does an excellent job of protection, so that the antenna will usually remain intact even if dropped quite a distance;[14] it also keeps the antenna silent and still when not needed. If the case is watertight, it is even more useful. Some folk, such as some merchants I know, prefer metal or wooden cases, often inlaid and decorated with precious metals and stones.

A last word of advice must go to the traveler: The antenna can only detect water — if there is no water near, the antenna is of no more use than another grain of sand.

Notes

1 — The distance that a pernicon can jump varies greatly. This author suggests a base horizontal range of 10′ and a vertical range of 5′. These figures should be adjusted at the DM's discretion, in consideration of such factors as wind speed and direction, and temperature. Pernicons function more sluggishly in lower temperatures, but this is not generally a factor in their desert environment.

2 — Despite his travels and knowledge of the desert, the Emir has made a small mistake. The pernicon's diet does not consist mainly of other animals, as he appears to imply. They are primarily herbivores. Jesouhd Ye'esif is, though, accurate about the creatures' method of attacking. Creatures "eaten" aid the creature by providing much-needed liquids, and some nutrients, but pernicons cannot live on fluids alone.

3 — Note that the pernicon's attack form will not harm certain creatures greatly, if at all, at the DM's discretion. The "immune" group should include all undead, most elementals and para-elementals (including such creatures as the thoqqua, dune stalkers, grues, etc.), some outer-planar creatures, golems, and so on. The DM should remember how the pernicon harms — it sucks out body liquids. If a creature has no body fluids, it won't be harmed, except by the pincer being clamped on or pulled off.

4 — This author considers 1-4 hp damage for the removal of a pincer of ½ inch in length (at most) to be excessive, and recommends only 1 hp damage be taken instead.

5 — A pernicon attached to a victim has AC 10. Note that if an attack is made on such a pernicon and the attack misses, a "to hit" roll against the victim should be required 50% of the time, with no dexterity adjustments applicable. Even if the pernicon is killed, its pincers remain in the victim, as noted in the FIEND FOLIO® Tome, p. 72.

6 — For dealing with combat between pernicons and armored characters, refer to the accompanying article.

7 — An inhabited "town" of pernicons will rarely, if ever, be located more than a mile from the border of the desert.

8 — Female pernicons lay eggs twice a year. Special moisture-holding chambers are made by the pernicons, by gluing grains of sand together with sticky saliva (produced from fluids drained from victims), to hold the hundred or so eggs deposited by each female after mating. Because of the thin, membranous shells of the eggs, they have to be deposited on moist sand lest they shrivel up and die before hatching. This is the reason that the pernicons tunnel down to reach ground water or moisture (which is closer to the surface near the border of the desert), and the major reason that they possess water-detecting antennae. After sand on the chambers' floor is sufficiently dampened and the eggs deposited, the chamber is sealed by saliva-glued sand to contain the moisture. The young hatch within a week or so and eat their own shells (and sometimes their neighbors' shells, or even their neighbors). They then burrow out to join the colony. As the average, only 1-6 of a pernicon's hundred laid eggs will survive to maturity.

9 — There is a 1% chance that an encounter with wandering pernicons will be with a moving colony, in which case the number appearing will be the lair size rather than the normal "wandering" size *(i.e.,* 300-3000 rather than 4-40). Player characters meeting such a group are advised to get as far away as possible, as fast as possible. Pernicons en route to a new lair are particularly aggressive, since they will need animal fluids for the construction of the tunnels and egg chambers of the new lair (see note 6).

10 — The FIEND FOLIO Tome is vague as to what a "large quantity" of water is. This author recommends that any water body of 5,000 gallons or more should be easily detectable. Smaller amounts should be detectable at closer ranges.

11 — This could be compared to the

liquid-crystal display in digital watches. Electricity causes the liquid crystal molecules to align in such a way as to absorb light, becoming visible to the observer. The radiations of water cause the pernicon antenna's oily fluid to behave in the opposite manner — going from a neutral state to chaotic and agitated. Fire causes the reverse, the liquid going to a rigidly structured form. Submersion in water destroys the antenna; the oily substance disperses rapidly, bursting out of and shattering the antenna.

12 — If a pernicon antenna is used by a cleric or druid as an additional material component for a *create water* spell, the spell will produce 10%-60% more water than it would otherwise. As with other material components, the pernicon antenna will disappear after the spell is cast.

13 — Successful removal is not automatic. The base chance, rolled on a d20, is equal to the dexterity of the character (or the average of two characters) attempting the removal, modified as follows:

If the first time ever tried, -10 (then -9 on the second, -8 on the third, etc.);

If special tools are used, + 2;

If thieves' tools are used by two characters, no adjustment;

If thieves' tools are used by one character, -2; and,

If other tools are used, such as hairpins, -2 (two characters) or -4 (one character).

The task requires the total concentration of the individual(s) involved. If work is disturbed before finishing the removal, there is an 80% chance of the antenna being ruined.

14 — Pernicon antennae should have saving throws for resisting damage from falling. Normally 20 is the proper save, but in such a bone case, it should be 10, adjusted upward by 2 for every 10′ fallen. A metal case grants a base saving throw of 8.

The pernicon: a new version

by John Nephew

While the previous article may be applied to the official pernicon found in the FIEND FOLIO® Tome, hopefully making it easier to integrate into your campaign, several problems remain with the original monster. It is awkward for a DM to handle in combat, particularly if the monster appears in large numbers?; and its hit points, damage, and constitution drain are extremely great and powerful characteristics for a two-inch insect to have.

Herewith is presented the ***revised*** pernicon. Parts of the following description are taken directly from the FIEND FOLIO Tome (p. 72) and credit for these portions (and, of course, the original idea) goes to the original author of the pernicon, Mary Patterson.

PERNICON

FREQUENCY: ***Rare***
NO. APPEARING: ***4-40 (in lair or moving colony, 300-3000)***
ARMOR CLASS: 3
MOVE: ***12" (plus jumping)***
HIT DICE: ***1 hit point***
% IN LAIR: ***20% (1% chance of the encounter being with a moving colony)***
TREASURE TYPE: ***See below***
NO. OF ATTACKS: ***1***
DAMAGE/ATTACK: ***1 hit point***
SPECIAL ATTACKS: ***Continuous damage***
SPECIAL DEFENSES: ***Nil***
MAGIC RESISTANCE: ***Standard***
INTELLIGENCE: ***Semi-***
ALIGNMENT: ***Neutral***
SIZE: ***S (2 inches long)***
PSIONIC ABILITY: ***Nil***
Attack/defense modes: ***Nil/nil***
LEVEL/X.P. VALUE: ***I/7 + 1/hp***

A brightly colored insect rather like a grasshopper about 2 inches long — red, yellow, ochire, and light blue — the pernicon inhabits the outer regions of deserts. It is much prized by the nomads of these regions, because the antennae on its head are water-diviners, vibrating and giving off a low hum when within 120′ of a large quantity of water.

The pernicon is usually inoffensive, but it attacks in large numbers if disturbed, accidentally or otherwise. It leaps on its victims and grips exposed flesh with the set of pincers at the rear of its abdomen. The pincers themselves do 1 hit point of damage and then begin draining the fluids of the victim at the rate of 1 hp per subsequent round, without requiring further "to hit" rolls. Normal pernicons are capable of draining 5 hp of fluids in that manner (thus being capable of doing 6 hp damage total), at which point they are quite bloated and will drop off the victim to crawl away.

A pernicon attached to a victim has an armor class of 10. However, on an attack against it that misses and is a roll of 4 or more under the number needed to hit it, the victim is hit and receives half-normal weapon damage (rounded down). If the insect is slain while attached, the pincers remain in the victim and continue to drain hit points (fluids) at the rate or 1 point per round. Removing the pincers, which can be done easily in 1 round by the victim or a companion, inflicts an additional 1 hp damage but stops the fluid loss.

Leader pernicons: In each colony of pernicons, there is one extraordinary leader pernicon, whose main functions are deciding when it's time to leave the lair, choosing where to establish a new lair, and breeding. Leader-type pernicons are different from normal sorts as follows: AC 2, 2 hp, 4" length, low intelligence, and the capability to drain up to 10 hp of fluids (at 1 hp/round). A leader-type pernicon invariably has its own chamber in the lair, and there is a 25% chance that the chamber's walls are of saliva-glued gold dust (value 2-12 gp if melted down). In mass combat (see below), the leader is treated as an individual monster, never as part of a swarm.

Combat: Since pernicons are small creatures that attack in large numbers, they are difficult to manage in a conventional combat manner. The following suggestions should help.

The main pernicon swarm always divides into small swarms of relatively equal size for each opponent. A swarm may then be in some ways treated as if it was a single creature (similar to the cifal; see the FIEND FOLIO Tome, page 19). Each pernicon has 1 hp, so the collective "creature" has as many hit points as there are pernicons within it. A victim is more likely to attack successfully against such a large number of insects, so the swarm's opponent receives +1 "to hit" for each ten pernicons alive and lighting him when the attack is made.

The number of pernicons that can actually attack depends on the clothing or armor of the opponent, as noted below.

Armor/clothing	Pernicons able to attack
Bare	200
Cloth	100
Leather	50
Studded leather	40
Ring mail	30
Scale mail	20
Chain mail	15
Splint mail	15
Banded mail	15
Elfin chain mail	12
Plate mail	10
Field plate	5
Full plate armor	3

Shields affect armor class (they can bat away insects), but not the number of creatures able to attack.

Combat is carried on in a fairly normal manner. When there are very large numbers of pernicons, it is recommended that the DM take a percentage (20 minus the number required to hit a pernicon, times

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five) of the number of pernicons able to attack as the number of successful hits. Each hit does 1 hp damage, and once pernicons are attached, they remain so for up to five more rounds. The number of pernicons attached to a victim reduces the number of pernicons able to make further attacks — thus, a person in full plate with three pernicons attached is effectively immune to further attack until the three drop off, though he takes only 3 hp damage per round from them.

Sample combat: Colonel Endrivan (9th-level fighter, 55 hp, STR 17, *chainmail +2,* shield, *longsword* +1) and his henchman Vandren of Agenelia (2nd-level fighter, 13 hp, STR 14, studded leather, shield, broadsword) have the misfortune of encountering 40 pernicons. The larger swarm divides into two swarms of 20 each.

First round: The Colonel and Vandren gain the initiative and attack. Both receive +2 to hit, since they are each fighting 20 pernicons. Colonel Endrivan needs a 5 and rolls an 18; Vandren needs a 15 and rolls a 14. Colonel Endrivan rolls a 6 for damage, adjusted by +2 for strength and magic, thus killing eight pernicons.

The pernicons attack. Chainmail allows all 12 pernicons remaining in Endrivan's swarm to attack, and they need a 19 to hit. The DM rolls a d20 twelve times, and three hit with rolls of 19 or 20, thus reducing the Colonel to 52 hp. Vandren does not fare so well. The DM does this the easy way; since a 15 is needed to hit Vandren and there are twenty pernicons, the DM judges five to have hit. Vandren is down to 8 hp.

Second round: The pernicons gain the initiative. For a start, the three pernicons attached to Endrivan and the five on Vandren take their toll, leaving 49 and 3 hp to the fighters, respectively. The nine pernicons swarming around Endrivan attack, and one hits. Five more of Vandren's attackers hit and he loses consciousness (at -2 hp) from blood and fluid loss. The ten pernicons attached feast to their capacity, and the ten that aren't attached now move toward Endrivan, to fight him the next round.

Colonel Endrivan fights back, receiving two attacks this round. Since there are only eight in his swarm, he needs a 7 to hit, but he misses twice with a 3 and a 4.

Third round: Once again, the insects gain the initiative. The four pernicons on Endrivan reduce him further to 44 hp. Those leaving the body of Vandren bring the number of attackers to eighteen, and two hit. Endrivan now needs a 6 to hit, and rolls an 8; the damage roll (a 6, plus adjustments) indicates that he has slain another eight pernicons.

Fourth round: Endrivan gains the initiative, and attacks twice; he needs a 6, and rolls 19 and 17, killing all "swarming" pernicons. Those attached do another 6 hp damage, leaving Endrivan at 36 hp.

Fifth round: The Colonel, having some knowledge of pernicons, attacks one of the more recently attached ones and removes it. He also removes the pincer, but is down to 30 hp at the end of the round.

Sixth round: Endrivan removes another pernicon, and the three who attached in the first round of combat fall off, bloated. The Colonel has 25 hp left.

Seventh round: Endrivan removes the last pernicon and pincer, and kills as many of the horrid, crawling beasties as he can find. He emerges from the encounter with 24 hp out of his original 55.

As can be seen, large numbers of pernicons are formidable even to high-level fighters. Of course, a ***wand of fire*** or ***cloudkill*** can do much to counteract an unwanted swarm of the pests. . . . ♈

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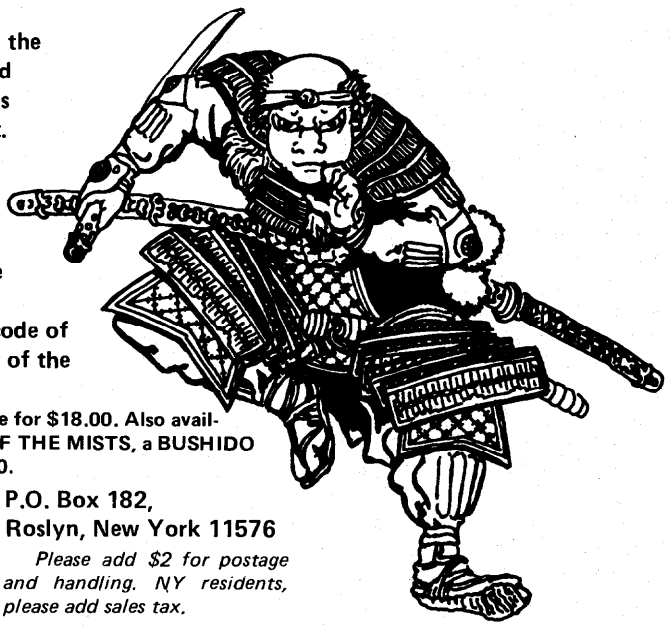

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THE ECOLOGY OF TIAMAT™

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Why She Ain't So Tough

by Michael D. Selinker

"Yeah, I killed her," Feargall the All-Noxious bellowed between gulps of Bohemian Loose Juice. "Bunches o' times. Even got one parked outside."

"ONE?" expostulated Greenhorn the Dim. "You mean there's MORE than one chromatic dragon[1]?"

"Where you been, boy?" Feargall hooted. "Shoot, there's thousands. Every tinhorn fighter worth his plate's killed at least one. Ain't you?"

Greenhorn stammered, "Well . . . no, but . . . ."

"Ah, y'ain't lived, boy. Why, I knock off one a month, at least. Paladin[2] pal o' mine gets three, four a week prob'ly. Course, he cheats. One o' them *scrolls of protection from breath weapons, dragon*[4] and that *protection from evil*[2] o' his and he c'n wade through a dozen of them things like cheese through . . . ."

"Uh, sir? I still don't understand. There's more than one Tiamat[1]?"

"You been standin' too close ta *fireballs*[2], boy? Course there's more 'n one. Heck, there's one at the bottom o' every dungeon, 'specially them dungeons by that Metzner fella, four or five in each o' those fer sure."

"But the *Monster Manual* says . . . ."

Feargall cut him off in mid-sentence. "Don't listen ta that book, boy. S'always wrong. That's what these here ecology articles're fer. And don't ferget that ® symbol next time; them game wizards'll *disintegrate*[2] ya fer less."

"But it says there's only . . . ."

"It also says they cain't be subdued. You just look right out that window and see if that ain't a subdued chromatic. I c'n see you could do with some acquaintancizin' with the chromatic, huh?"

"I guess so, sir," Greenhorn muttered, his complexion becoming a whiter shade of albino.

"Now, cheer up, boy, and give a listen. Thing is, the AD&D® Game *Monster Manual*'s way outta date. There USED to be just one Tiamat, but that was before she and this Bahamut[1] joker got t'gether on the first plane o' Hell and, well . . . ."

"But . . . but Bahamut's lawf—"

"He SAYS he's lawful good[2], but ya gotta take that with a grain o' salt. After all, POLYHEDRON™ Newszine said alignment don't mean the same thing to them deity-class critters. So anyways, all these little chromatics grow up just itchin' ta live up ta mom's rep, so's they all hit the Prime Material[2] and start hoardin' treasure. So now us high-levels're stuck with the cleanin' up."

"How do you kill Tiamat?"

"Shucks, s'easy, boy. Heck, they only got 128 hit points and armor class 0. *Vorpal blade*[3] cuts through that easy. Chop a head off with sixteen points a damage. SIX-TEEN, boy. 'Sides, they only get six attacks a round — 114 points maximum from bites and sting, IF they hit. And her breath don't amount to no more'n 360 points worth a day, even with all five heads. Prop up a mage with a few dozen *meteor swarms*[2] — standard magic resistance, y'know — and y're home free."

"Doesn't she usually have guards?"

"What, them wimps? Get this, she's got one o' each — red, green, blue, black, white — and they're ADULTS. Not ancients, oh no, but ADULTS. One good sized *chain lightnin'*[4] and you've got dragon stew fer months."

"What about her spells?"

"What's she gonna use, *cone o' cold*[2]? She's only got fifth level spells, tops. Not like she's usin' *wishes*[2] or nuthin'."

"She's got a lot of treasure?"

"Naw, just 100% H, S, T, U[1]. Y're lucky if y'walk away with eight potions and a half dozen scrolls, plus maybe a miscellaneous magic or two. Course, if y'encounter four or five . . . ."

"At the same time?"

"Well no, they don't like each other much. Have trouble tellin' each other apart, y'know, what with 'em all lookin' the same, greenish-white belly and all. But they're often hangin' around the same places, on account o' there ain't all that many official dungeons around. Gotta be approved by TSR, y'know."

"But what if she's flying?"

"90% in lair, boy. No room ta fly in tiny dungeon corridors."

"But I STILL don't . . . ."

"One second, boy," interrupted Feargall. "Gotta grab myself another ale. Yo, barkeep!"

Thunder roared as the innkeeper sauntered over to the two fighters. "May I be of some service, sir?"

"Course ya can, boy, course ya can," bellowed Feargall grandly. "Rack up another keg o' yer finest — make that three. And step on it."

"Very good, sir," the innkeeper replied. "Anything else?"

"Naw, naw," Feargall said with a belch. "But if ya want, I c'n probably do somethin' 'bout them seven silly little canaries buzzin' 'round yer ears."

"Thank you, no," replied the barkeep, calmly *disintegrating* Feargall before returning to his palace behind the east wind.

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The ecology of the displacer beast

by Bill Mickelson

What you see is not what (or where) you hit

The following was taken from the lecture notes of the mage and naturalist Jen-Ahb, after he was mauled to death by a rogue displacer beast in the bestiary of the University of Sarkawan.

The displacer beast is a magical creature that resembles a large black panther, save for its six legs and the pair of horned tentacles sprouting from its shoulders. Its name derives from its ability to appear up to a full yard away from its actual position, caused by subtle vibrations emitted from its flesh that apparently refract light to distort the beast's apparent location. This enables the beast to avoid most initial attacks, which are directed at the illusionary form which usually appears closer to the attacker. From this power and from their own stamina, ferocity, and lighting skill, they are also highly resistant to magical effects, poison, and attacks that may be dodged (such as a dragon's breath). They are devilishly hard to kill.

In order to learn more about these strange creatures, I had to capture one alive — a task made most difficult by their rarity. What few displacer beasts there are prefer to live in the deep wilderness — in old forests, mountains and hilly regions, on vast plains, and even in the desert. Occasionally a pack of them is found in a swamp. The swamp variety tends to be somewhat larger than other sorts and swims very well. It is especially dangerous because of these facts, and because the swamp provides excellent cover for ambushes.

I was able to obtain a grant from our lordship and a leave from this university to obtain a specimen of this creature for study. I gathered a force of porters and armed men and proceeded into the Broken Spire country, where we searched for three weeks. Finally, we sighted a large male displacer on a mountainside, and one of my more zealous followers cast a net at the beast — missing, of course. It then ran off with incredible speed, apparently without using its front legs for travel. The beast looked for a few moments like a feline centaur.

After a few more luckless days, we were blessed to come across a displacer beast cave, which I identified at once by the abrasions left on the cave mouth from the beast's habit of sharpening its claws and tentacles on bare rock. Realizing our danger as well as our fortune, I deployed the twelve mercenaries with us about the cave in pairs, arming them with short swords as well as their nets. Two of my assistants carried long darts, especially prepared with a sleeping venom approved by the Council of Scholars and our lordship for use against rogue creatures who share no humanity.

Having prepared my spells and said my prayers to the gods and the university's alchemical staff (who had mixed the sleeping venom), I gave a signal and every man present gave out a roaring shout. We abruptly discovered, as the displacers emerged, that we had found a family lair. An enormous male, purple-black in color, a smaller female of blue tone, and two cubs rushed forth. My amazement could only be imagined, as no young displacer beasts had ever been known in these lands, and it had been assumed that such creatures were somehow generated full-grown. I was barely able to recover myself to raise the iron nail in my hands and speak the words to the spell of holding. The mercenaries hurled their nets at the male, almost forgetting about the rest of the pack in their haste to bring down the greater threat, and chaos reigned for the space of perhaps a minute.

Merciful are the gods of the university, and wise are the old men in the alchemical department! At our moment of greatest peril, the male beast's natural resistances failed him as the iron nail vanished from my hands and the male displacer vanished — only to reappear several feet away, flat on the ground, paralyzed! Only one of the many nets hurled had even struck him, entangling his horned tentacles and perhaps sparing the life of a soldier that the beast had begun to maul. The soldier himself was caught by the spell, but was no worse for the experience and was quickly treated by Brother Synon of Saint Ardan's, who accompanied us. The blue-black female succumbed to a dart from one of my aides, and the cubs were quickly netted as they tried to escape.

A marvelous find, I must admit. The male was huge, measuring 11' from nose to tail, with 7' tentacles. It weighed in at about 600 lbs. The female was quite a bit

smaller, only about 8′ long and 450 lbs., but was in excellent health. Each cub was about the size of a large housecat, but lacked the characteristic tentacles, having only knobby growths instead. In captivity here at the university, the cubs quickly developed their adult size and appearance within a matter of weeks. Their growth rate was astonishing. It appears that they reached full maturity at the ripe old age of four months.

The displacer beast's claim to fame is, of course, it's power to appear 3′ away from its actual location. The sage Dunmeyer has written extensively of displacers, though he had not studied live ones, and he once conjectured that his remarkable effect was somehow caused by molecular vibrations. Until I was able to shed new light on this mystery, anyone else could do nothing but guess, though my research is far from complete itself. It seems now that the molecular vibrations, stimulated by a specialized group of nerves, occur only in the outer layers of the beast's skin cells. Where as the vibrational movement is too minute to be normally noticed, it is sufficient to bend and redirect the rays of colored light. The refracted light rays form the illusionary image while the true form is masked, virtually invisible. This magical power is automatic, but it may be consciously directed by the beast itself.

It is still unknown, even to me, precisely how the light rays are deflected by the vibrations. Due to the beast's magical nature, I would not be at all surprised if the supernatural had a fair hand in the origin of the talent. Interestingly enough, displacer beasts are able to see each other's true forms and are not deceived by displacing — in fact confirmed by watching them in captivity.

Although only full-grown displacer beasts are found in packs outside the lair, obviously there are young. They never leave the lair until they are full-grown or the family moves to another locale. It seems as if the beasts do not want the young to be out before their displacing talent has been acquired. As violently disposed as they are to other creatures, they do not fight among their own species and exhibit no sense of rivalry among themselves, except for the play of young cubs. This playful behavior vanishes with adulthood. I am currently attempting to familiarize one of the grown displacers in the bestiary to my presence, though without much success.

Given the observations of other explorers who have recently visited the Broken Spires on other quests, we have a more complete picture of the life of the average displacer beast. Lairs contain two adult displacer beasts — male and female, of course — and perhaps as many as four cubs, though usually only one or two are produced. The birth rate among displacers appears to be quite low, given their small numbers. Little is known about their mating or birthing procedures. Unlike most carnivorous mammals, displacer cubs are born with their eyes open and a set of usable teeth for eating meat right away. Adult females have mammary glands and nurse their cubs until they leave the lair at the age of four months. Newborn kittens have no tentacles and are about the size of small housecats, though after the first eight weeks their tentacles sprout and grow at the rate of an inch or so a day until after about 30 days more have passed. At this time, the cubs will measure close to 4½′ long, weigh near 90 lbs., and generally be the same size as a large lynx. At the end of the first year, length and weight will be approximately 7½′ and 350 lbs., respectively.

From then on, the length of the tail will be around one-third of the overall body length, and tentacles will typically equal half the total length. When the beast reaches full maturity after two years, 10′ is average length for a male, with 9′ being the norm for females. Weight is about 500 lbs. for males, females 450. The extremely fast growth is even more impressive when one stops to consider that the beast's average lifespan is perhaps close to 100 years.

Distantly related to the true cats, the displacer beasts hunt in a similar fashion but often for more powerful game, such as giant deer, boars, cattle, buffalo, bears, and (as every child knows) blink dogs. They move silently until within striking distance for a lightning-fast attack made by several adults at once. They generally use only their tentacles, but their fangs and talons may be brought into play in close combat. Though they walk at a quick pace on all six legs when fighting or running, they raise their forelegs to claw at victims if they so desire and can run on their rear four legs without difficulty.

Displacer beasts can leap 20′ straight up, 25′ across on a standing jump, and double that on a running jump. Unlike many other creatures with more than four legs that have slow metabolisms, the displacer beast can move with great speed and with high dexterity despite the extra pair of legs that might get in the way.

I regret to say it, but a great many of those who have followed my work care little about my discoveries on how the displacer beast hides its form and creates an illusionary one, being more interested in the creature's violent temperament. "Why are they so vicious around blink dogs?" is the most often-asked question that comes from visitors to the university bestiary. Indeed, the murderous fury of a displacer beast is fit only for nightmares, of which I had several after our successful hunting expedition. Not being especially intelligent or cunning, displacers are not subtle when they burst into attack. They have been seen to maul any beast that comes within striking range of them, from humans to small dragons, and rumors abound of howling battles between some large carnivore and a hungry pack of displacers, shrieking and screaming their fury as they savagely tear their prey to shreds.

I know of few things to compare such madness to in the animal kingdom, not even excepting the behavior of certain berserkers and were-beasts. I have evidence that some process connected to their maturation, likely a growth hormone, affects their minds as they go from amiable kitten to adult killer. From the moment that the tentacles of the two kittens we had captured began to grow, the kittens became irascible and violent. I have scars on my left arm from wounds caused by Emerald Fire, the larger of the pair, that have only recently healed. This terrible nature only grows worse over time, though, as I've said before, they will not attack their own kind. Perhaps the scent of one another is the key element in preventing these attacks; I cannot say, though I have further experiments planned.

As foul-tempered as it is, the displacer beast reserves its most intense hatred for blink dogs. There seems to be a particular reason for this, as my research has shown, but the explanation was hard to come by. The two species both prefer temperate climates, but the displacer beast usually lives in the forests and mountains, whereas the blink dog is generally a creature of the open plains, so there are no territorial disputes or fights over prey on a species-wide basis. The "dog-and-cat" hypothesis holds no water here, as you might guess, since cats and dogs are not enemies by nature.

My explanation is based upon prolonged experimentation (and the deaths of several blink dogs). The very actions of displacement and blinking seem to interfere with the nervous and mental systems of the opposing creatures. I have seen a blindfolded displacer beast jump and yowl when a blink dog was allowed to teleport itself within several feet of the former's cage. The blink dog, in turn, began to snarl and bark in the direction of the displacer even though it, too , was blindfolded, had its sensitive nose covered, and was within the area of a spell of silence. Detection of the other is automatic for each, and appears to trigger hate, ferocity, and violence in both animals, especially the displacer beast, whose special nerves are spread throughout its entire body. This occurs whenever the creatures are within 150′ of one another.

Even if the blink dogs are not using their power or if the displacer beasts are asleep and not using theirs, both have learned to identify the other by scent and sight, provoking automatic flight or attack, depending upon the circumstances. Both species can also detect the approximate location of their enemy should their respective special powers be brought into play, and some rather sophisticated wild blink dogs have learned to not use their powers when preparing ambushes for the displacers. Blink dogs get a general feeling for the direction in which a displacer beast lies, but the displacers can find a blink dog as soon as it blinks in with unfailing accuracy.

As a side note, I would be curious to learn the effect upon a blink dog of wearing one of those remarkable displacing cloaks that adventurers talk about. I would wager

that being caught by a pack of the creatures would not be a pleasant experience!

A truly unique and interesting creature, the displacer beast. I am more than happy to spend the rest of my life studying it.

Appendix

1. To determine the orientation of a displacer beast and its illusionary form, roll d10. On a result of 1-5, the illusion is in front of the creature (positioned between the creature and an opponent it is facing). On a roll of 6-7, the illusion is to the creature's left; 8-9, to the creature's right; and on a roll of 0 (10), the illusion is behind the creature's actual position.

2. A lone opponent facing a displacer beast has a - 2 penalty "to hit" on any occasion except when the displacer beast has scored a hit earlier in the current round of combat. If more than one opponent is involved against a single beast, additional foes have their "to hit" penalties reduced by 1 for each extra foe involved: the second opponent hits at - 1, and the third and all subsequent opponents have normal chances to hit. (This assumes that the multiple opponents have arranged themselves so as to partially or entirely surround the creature.) If a beast is hit by any attack against it in a given round and it does not move, then all opponents who viewed the successful hit can attack at no penalty in the following round. Infravision will reveal the actual location of a displacer beast, as will *true seeing* or other similar magical means.

3. Displacers rarely use their claws and teeth unless near death or fighting a very large opponent. Each claw attack does 1-6 hp damage, and each bite 2-12 hp damage. Such an attack routine involves two tentacles, two claws, and a bite, though it can claw with the middle and rear pairs of feet as well if it can leap down upon an opponent or attack a prone one. Very large beasts will also be attacked with all available clawed feet.

4. When it is running on four legs, the beast's movement rate is doubled (30") for 3-12 rounds.

5. Attacks for immature displacer beasts are as follows: Treat those 1-4 weeks in age as a normal cat *(Monster Manual II,* and those 5-8 weeks old as a wild cat. The growth spurt begins here, so those kittens from 9-12 weeks old attack as a lynx (with the middle set of claws doing 1-2/1-2 on rakes), but cannot use their tentacles effectively (1-4/1-4 for attacks in the 11th and 12th weeks). Attacks between claws, teeth, and tentacles are evenly divided at this stage. As the cub grows older, it comes to rely heavily upon its tentacle attacks, using them as whips. Displacers 13-16 weeks old attack as adults, using their tentacles to cause 1-6/1-6 damage. Attacks are normal at the end of the first year. Those kittens under one week old have no effective attacks.

6. Although listed as neutral in alignment, some displacers have truly evil natures, and this will show up in *detect alignment* spells.

7. Blink dogs will attack anyone wearing a *cloak of displacement* with great ferocity. Displacer beasts, however, are not bothered by those who cast the spell *blink* upon themselves. The cause for the latter's distress lies in the magical biology of the blink dog, not in the nature of the spell itself.

8. A displacer beast's illusionary form is not like a regular illusion, in that it is not dispelled upon contact and it cannot be "disbelieved" out of existence. Striking the illusionary form will not reveal the actual location of the beast, but will of course reveal the illusion for what it is.

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The ecology of the Remorhaz

by Kurt Martin and Ed Greenwood

An account from the lore-book entitled "Journeys and Trials of Rekansor; Explorer, Scout, and Leader of Men":

. . . Thus began the hardest segment of the journey back to our civilized lands in the east. Our clothing was barely adequate against the increasing chill, and we were reduced painfully in both numbers and supplies. Each day the true test of winter drew nearer, and even as we first began to struggle up the steep escarpments that announced the Krylen Peaks, the cold of their icy reaches stretched down to greet us with bitter blasts. The twelve of us yet remaining trudged on, weary to the soul of adventure, desiring only the end of the road and safety.

Arriving at the foot of Al-Kindor, the westernmost and mightiest of these mountains, I found a possible route for my group. Pressed by Time himself, we began to follow this sketchy path that picked its way through the fallen boulders at the mountain's base.

This way seemed to lead as we hoped: around the mountain on its southernmost side. With Al-Kindor at our backs, we could traverse the range at this narrow point in as little as two days. We pushed onward, climbing between the jumbled rocks in an endless, stumbling dance. Only the quick passing of this obstacle, this king of mountains, would put us within reach of the plains of home before all hope ended with the coming of winter. Each of us knew secretly that we would not survive even one true snowfall.

Curious as ever, I wondered at the improving sureness of the path as it wandered neatly among the rocks. With the first fluffy pockets of snow collecting under a new fall, the path remained solid and clear, yet no tracks were visible in the old snow to reveal the users of such a fine mountain course. The snow stiffened its assault, clutching at sword and arrow as well as hunched shoulders and hooded heads.

Above us loomed Al-Kindor, half shrouded in cloud. His jagged peaks tore at the clouds, ripping the snow from them. Already the upper reaches were turning distinctly white. The sky hung over us, a dismal grey, like the snow-dusted stone our boots scuffed over. For a moment, the sun poked a crimson ray out over the frozen tundra as it sank at our backs, setting the falling flakes on fire, turning white puffs into red drops of blood. I shivered at this grim omen.

We pushed on, intent on covering more ground before nightfall, hastily shuffling past a dark gap in the rocks — an aperture our inner selves warned us to avoid. Little did we know, it was a door where the remorhaz, the owner of the path, lay in terrible wait. Cunningly, the creature paused at our arrival, waiting for its body to warm from the stillness of its hunting vigil; waiting until all but the last of our party had struggled past before attacking with a birdlike shriek that chilled my blood more than the previous hours of frost had.

I turned to see a huge creature, looking much like a massive centipede, snapping at my men with enormous, fanged jaws. Its white, icy eyes glared down on us as the small, membranous wings on the sides of its head flapped to lift its jaws high for another strike. The remorhaz's thick neck arched, and the long, curving black horns on its head were silhouetted against the grim sky as it screamed another challenge. Now I saw clearly the folly of following such an easy path.

The beast's heavily scaled body was a man's height across and gleamed a cold blue, stretching away for several long strides before winding into the gap in the rocks. Along its back, a wide streak of bright red stood out, steaming from the creature's heat. Dozens of short, chitinous legs supported the low-slung bulk as it again snapped forward, its hard talons clattering on the stone.

Three of my party already lay silent in the gathering snow, torn by the beast's four horrible fangs. As my comrades threw back their hoods and heavy cloaks, snatching at weapons and shields, I quickly drew my bow and an arrow, and bounded to a rock at the path's edge. Pulling myself onto the frigid stone, I readied for a shot as Benol, my finest scout, dropped to the snow, her body hewn almost in two by a strike from the monster's jaws. Even as she fell, and my first arrow glanced harmlessly off the beast's armorlike skin, my group started forming a battle line, their weapons seeking the creature's weaker points.

Kelor thrust himself directly in front of the creature, his wide bastard sword glowing dully in the fading light. The remorhaz screeched as if in answer to his challenge and drew its head up to twice the height of a man. Kelor jumped forward, his sword swung back, ready for a massive blow. Then, despite the impact of two arrows, the beast shot forward blindingly fast, and Kelor disappeared into the snapping jaws. His sword, clattering noisily on the rocks, was the only evidence of where he had once stood.

We fought on instead of trying to flee; doubtless the creature could outrun us, tired as we were. Thoughts cluttered my mind as I searched desperately for a shard of hope. I could see Farvus, alone off to my left, hard at work with his spell magic. I whispered a silent prayer for his success as I returned to my bow-work; my red-feathered arrows were beginning to accumulate in the creature's soft underbelly. In spite of these wounds, and several rents from swords, the remorhaz seemed prepared to fight us to the last.

From amidst the rocks into which the long creature's body coiled, I saw the small, florentine form of Kartha emerge, his eyes intent on the monster's swinging head. I watched him, distracted from my attack, as he slunk alongside the kicking legs, staying clear of the red streak on the creature's back where the falling snow sizzled and steamed.

Kartha moved closer, perilously close to the thrusting, coiling neck, before pausing to stretch, raising his weapons high in the air. He plunged them into the steaming protrusions with an angry shout. The remorhaz heaved forward with a shriek of pain, throwing the overextended Kartha off balance. He glanced off the beast's back, let out a shrill scream, and fell limply to the snow. Curls of smoke rose from his still form. I paused in shock as the remorhaz snapped out again, oblivious to the knife and sword as they melted, then dripped into the snow.

Glancing frantically back to see what Farvus was doing, I was further shocked to see his obvious frustration. Already he had turned to shield and mace and was advancing toward the creature, which was now faced with only five standing opponents. I dropped from the rock and drew my sword to strike the remorhaz face to face. It was terrifying work. In a few short moments, my vision began to blur from the effort of slashing at the monster and desperately trying to avoid its fatal bite. I slipped and lunged in the damp snow, my tired legs heavy as logs. I managed to cut the thing twice, though my sword was heavy even in both hands. Its wings flapping, the beast snapped at me, its breath overpowering, its cries daunting.

Helt screamed as a fang tore into her. The remorhaz tossed her aside in a heap. But in the moment it took to do so, Farvus and I attacked with desperate strength, hitting the exposed neck, my sword biting deep into the softer underside of the monster's head.

Hacked and hewn, the snapping head finally dropped into the snow. Only three of us remained to see the creature's final moments — and we took no great pleasure in its demise. As we stood about the remorhaz for a long, silent minute, the cruel wind tore at our skin. Despair was in our hearts; the battle was won, but at too great a cost. Puffs of snow stood on the faces of our fallen friends. Distant were their homes and ours. Anguished, it struck me as likely that we would travel no great distance beyond that point — not with the bulk of the company silenced forever around us. Slowly we turned from the scene of battle, and looked again to the east. . . .

Notes

1. A remorhaz has a segmented body, like other worms, plus a winged neck and head. Each segment (a polar worm will have one such segment per hit die it possesses) consists of a central "core," or body cavity, where the digestive organs are located, surrounded by a network of terrifically strong muscles linked by corded nerves, and the whole sheathed by the worm's rock-hard external insulation and armor. Each segment is supported by a pair of flexible legs covered in similar segmented armor, each leg ending in a foot consisting of a large suction pad (devoid of nerves, so that a remorhaz cannot feel pain through its feet) and two iron-hard "toe-talons." These talons serve to propel the remorhaz across the most slippery ice — the "blue ice" at the heart of glaciers where the creatures prefer to lair. In conditions where a remorhaz's feet begin to slip, it will automatically drive its talons into the surface underfoot. It cannot penetrate hard rock, but can readily find and cling to fissures and cracks in rock, or penetrate softer rocks (such as sandstone), ice, frozen mud, and the like. Fallen prey and items so impaled by a talon will suffer damage as follows: Creatures suffer 4-9 (1d6 + 3) hit points of damage, and all items (such as armor) must save versus crushing blow or be damaged beyond usability. Magic items will of course gain bonuses to any such saving throws in accordance with their magical plusses; but note that all sorts of items may suffer penalties on saving throws due to the brittleness that extreme cold causes in many materials.

A remorhaz does not gain or lose heat through its feet or body armor unless the body armor has been broken (before an insulating scab of internal protective fluids forms), except through its back protrusions. Given steady food, a remorhaz will regenerate a completely lost pair of legs in twenty days or so; lesser damage could well be healed in half the time. A remorhaz can slither at half movement rate — but not climb bare ice walls — if all of its legs are gone; if more than half of its legs are gone, it will move at 9″ per round. Liquid mud or deep sand (which will not be encountered by a remorhaz in its normal habitat) will slow movement to 6″; unfrozen water is avoided by a remorhaz in the polar regions as it cools the worm's body with dangerous rapidity. A remorhaz can swim at the rate of 9″ per round.

2. The wings of a remorhaz aid in stability while rearing and lunging (and rarely, while slipping or falling), and in regulating body heat (see notes below), but cannot lift the entire body of the worm; a remorhaz cannot fly. The remorhaz can only raise its head and neck with the aid of these wings. The wings must beat continuously in order to do this and are highly susceptible to attack. The attacker must hit versus AC -2 to strike them, since they are small, fast-moving, and often out of reach. Area fire spells such as *fireball* will also affect the wings, with each wing taking as many points of damage as the creature has hit dice before becoming useless. The loss of one or both wings will cause the remorhaz to attack at - 3 to hit, since it will no longer be able to rear up and snap at its opponent. The remorhaz will, however, still be able to move and maneuver, and this state will inadvertently prevent attacks to its soft underside.

Damage done by the remorhaz's four fangs and sharp-edged jaws is determined by the size of the creature, with 13 and 14 HD specimens having the ability to swallow man-sized or smaller prey whole on a roll of 20. However, halflings and other small demi-humans, and creatures of similar size may be swallowed in this manner by a remorhaz as small as 11 HD; elves and small humans can likewise be swallowed whole by a 12 HD remorhaz. On any roil of 20, check the size of the

remorhaz to see if it is capable of swallowing the creature it has bitten. Even if the target is not swallowed, it takes full bite damage from that attack.

A remorhaz of 7 or 8 HD bites for 4-24 points of damage; 9 to 12 HD creatures do 5-30 points; and 13 to 14 HD creatures do 6-36 points. When raised up to strike, a remorhaz is 9 inches tall for every hit die it has. Thus, a 14 HD remorhaz would be 10 feet, 6 inches tall at the head and could attack a character standing on a second-story balcony. The remorhaz can strike out an equal distance horizontally.

3. The area of the remorhaz most vulnerable to physical attack is its eyes, which are actually two great, white, globular clusters of lenses, all working together, and all milky-white because they have natural filters to correct for snow glare. These natural filters allow the remorhaz to see reflections and movements with great clarity — and in gloom or at night with 9" ultravision (in full darkness, or when confused, a remorhaz uses the 7" infravision of its tiny eyes). Each compound eye has more than a thousand tiny eyes within it — thus, an attack to the eyes is not likely to blind a remorhaz; up to a dozen or more strikes on each eye would be necessary to accomplish that. A remorhaz regenerates its eyes only slowly (each tiny eye would take about 30 turns to heal, and only one at a time will be replaced by the worm's body).

Because of these insectlike eyes, remorhaz (the plural form is the same as the singular) have excellent peripheral vision. In combat, they are equally likely to strike at any creature in an arc of 180 degrees in front of them, with preference given to those striking the most recent, most damaging blows against it. The target of the remorhaz's attack will be at -2 to hit for the round after their attack, due to the overpowering stench of the creature's superheated breath (normal if they make their save vs. breath weapon). Remorhaz do not deliberately claw or trample prey, nor do they ever strike at them with their "tails" or nether body segments. In combat, they may "pin" opponents with their weight and bite at them, but prefer to rear up (aided by their wings) and lunge at all prey, biting with speed enough to knock down many aerial opponents, and with reach enough to strike from a rearing position at opponents up to half the remorhaz's own length away (on the ground or in the air).

The majority of the remorhaz's body is heavily insulated with armor that renders it proof against any harm from scraping against or over ice. The most flexible parts of the armor (and hence, the softest) are the underside regions of each segment, which must have softness and flexibility to aid traction over uneven ice — hence, the lower armor class. The intermediate armor class rating of a remorhaz reflects the relative vulnerability of its mouth and eyes, despite the mobility of the head as a target. Man-sized opponents of a remorhaz will find that while the creature's underside is softer than the rest of its body, only two attackers can strike at this area, with one standing on each side of the raised head. Other opponents standing directly in front of the remorhaz (two at most) can strike at the AC 2 head. All other attacks are versus AC 0.

4. Remorhaz have three life states: dormant, cold, and heated. Since remorhaz can "burn up" the energy provided by a large meal (such as two horses) in just a few hours of tunneling, moving, or fighting, they spend much of their time in either a dormant or cold state — dormant being a very sluggish, economical condition, and cold being active without heating the back protrusions. Remorhaz are always eager to eat, since they are active in proportion to how much they consume. Because of their metabolism, polar worms make ambush their primary hunting mode, and only occasionally travel in search of prey. A remorhaz will lay in wait along a well-travelled road in a "cold" state. When prey is sighted, the remorhaz heats its back protrusions, then attacks. Remorhaz lie dormant through periods when prey is scarce, spending at least one day in five dormant in any case. Dormant periods are always spent in the lair.

When excited (by easy prey when it is hungry) or angered by prey that eludes it, seems formidable, challenges it, or causes it pain, a remorhaz will cause its back protrusions — the blunt "horns" or projections, two of which rise at angles from the ridged top or back of each of its body segments and form two rows of craggy bumps — to become extremely hot, conducting the worm's internal digestive heat by means of internally produced and circulated fluids. This chemical, which is known as thrym, is released from its two stomachs, and pumped at great pressure into its insulated back horns. A remorhaz will then lunge at opponents and roll slightly to one side, seeking to crush or pin, and then burn with its horns. Contact with the cherry-red remorhaz horns does 10d10 points of damage to all creatures not impervious to (or protected against) heat damage; cooler, darker horns do only 5d10 points of damage. (A roll of 1-2 on 1d6 determines a hit with the darker, cooler horns.) Protection is provided by any item such as a *ring of fire resistance* — not just a normal item, such as armor or a pair of gloves, Damage to protected areas will still occur, though at a rate of 1/10 regular damage: 1d10 points for regular horns, 1d5 points for cooler horns. Non-magical metal weapons melt when touching cherry-red remorhaz horns; they gain a saving throw (vs. magical fire) against cooler horns. Magical metal weapons gain a saving throw vs. acid (with their magical bonuses, if any) against cherry-red remorhaz horns, and a saving throw vs. magical fire at + 5 (disregard magical bonuses) against the cooler horns; other magic items save vs. acid or magical fire - whichever is worse — against cherry-red remorhaz horns, and must make a saving throw of only half as much to escape damage from the cooler horns. Most creatures will feel the heat when they are within ten feet of the protrusions; these may also steam when wet. The remorhaz will usually heat its back to aid in tunneling through ice and snow, and will always do so in battle.

A remorhaz heats up its back in bursts of energy, for in doing so it is sacrificing its body heat to its chilly surroundings — and could freeze to death if it gives up too much heat. Normally, a remorhaz that decides to heat warms up for 2 rounds (during which time it has cooler horns, as above), fights for up to 6 additional rounds of cherry-red heat (less if it wins its fight, for it will shut down as soon as possible), and then follows with a further 2 rounds of cooling. A remorhaz of 10 HD or less can usually manage only one such burst every 36 hours (unless it can eat at will to provide more fuel; a nesting female remorhaz surrounded by already slain meals at hand is one example); a remorhaz of 11 to 14 HD can usually manage 10 rounds of full heat, typically in two bursts of 6 and 4 rounds each. If the air is damp, concealing plumes of fog will begin to form around the remorhaz as the cold air comes into contact with its back horns. The average remorhaz must take in one size M meal (of warm-blooded prey) every 36 hours to keep its heat at the required level, otherwise it risks the chance of freezing to death.

If a remorhaz gets too hot (usually only when removed from its normal environment), its surroundings reaching 60 degrees Fahrenheit or more, it will begin to fan itself with its wings, passing air over its back horns to carry the heat they radiate away. The remorhaz will grow sluggish (operating at half movement), but will not otherwise suffer harm from the excess heat. When it becomes cool again, the remorhaz will recover rapidly (in 1 or 2 rounds) to full movement and activity.

5. As a snakelike carnivore, the remorhaz requires special digestive processes to aid in breaking down the huge hunks of meat it swallows. Two tiny stomach glands produce and contain fluids that mix to make the liquid called thrym, which is then circulated through the creature's back protrusions and/or stomach. Digestion is achieved with both the heat and acidity of thrym. Since the liquid is extremely hot and caustic, there have been no known cases of even swallowed magical items surviving immersion in thrym, although it might be possible for artifacts and relics to do so. Molten metals and other indigestible materials are immediately excreted through a flap at the bottom of the beast's stomach. Wood and

leather are easily dissolved, if not useful to the remorhaz itself.

Obviously, anyone unfortunate enough to be swallowed by a remorhaz would be killed instantly by the tremendous -heat of the creature's body. Even major protection such as a *ring of fire resistance* would only allow a person to survive 1 or 2 rounds inside a remorhaz. DMs must be firm on this count, since killing the creature in the round after it swallows someone, then cutting the creature open to rescue the victim would still require that person to withstand at least 2 rounds of the phenomenal, acidic heat.

The remorhaz's thrym is the reason for its high magic resistance. This substance has a high anti-magic value, whether actually heating the creature or not; thus, the remorhaz's magic resistance remains the same regardless of the creature's state until it dies (see below). Note that all spells cast at a remorhaz must overcome this - 75% magic resistance, then the remorhaz's saving throws (if applicable); fire is saved against at +4, heat does no damage (being either absorbed to the benefit of the remorhaz, or lost), cold is saved against at - 3, and electrical-based attacks are saved against at par.

6. A polar worm's lair will usually consist of a number of large, smoothly rounded tunnels in ice and snow or rock, gradually descending to a bigger, central room. Tunnels in ice or snow will be very slippery, since the passing of the creature's hot back will repeatedly melt the snow, but leave it to quickly refreeze. With its numerous hard feet, the remorhaz moves at full speed on sheer ice (if it is a level surface) and has no problems in its own lair and tunnel complex. Remorhaz usually move with their heads down, their wings inactive, looking something like a walking snake. As a result of this position, remorhaz cannot snap out with their usual dexterity, and are thus somewhat vulnerable in small tunnels.

The central room of the remorhaz lair is generally about twice the width and length of the remorhaz that inhabits it, and has several entrances and exits. The nesting lair of a mated pair will be about double this size, and may have ice stalactites hanging from the ceiling as a result.

Remorhaz have no use for treasure as we know it; any treasure found will consist of belongings left behind by devoured prey — either scattered about the icy wastes or on the floor of the remorhaz's lair. Such treasure rarely consists of arms or armor, since these are usually destroyed or lost in combat, and will never be anything that cannot survive the extreme cold or inadvertent pummeling by the remorhaz. A remorhaz will take prey into its lair only when it is threatened by a storm or by other predators, if its meal is threatened by other, smaller predators too nimble or too numerous for the polar worm to slay, or if it is a male feeding a nesting female or a female hunting with its young.

7. Remorhaz mate only in glacial tunnels and icy caverns, although they range all over cold regions when hunting, often wandering far from their lairs; if they remained in a small area, food there would soon be exhausted. If food is scarce, remorhaz sometimes come down off the high glaciers into the tundra or even to the edge of muskeg regions to hunt. With the exception of mates, and mothers and their young, remorhaz hunt and lair alone; when food is plentiful, remorhaz of different sexes will instinctively wander out of their own normal ranges (each remorhaz has an informal, shifting circular territory of approximately 60 miles across) and seek one another out, establishing a nesting lair after they meet. They signal their presence at such rutting times by great, mournful roars, sounding at times like great wolves, and repeatedly rear up and flap their vestigial wings to attract notice. Remorhaz seldom fight among themselves over territory, mates, or prey.

Remorhaz females are generally larger than males (there are no 14 HD males), but they are otherwise identical in powers and appearance. A mated pair will stay together only until the eggs have hatched. During this time, the female will produce one or two grey-blue eggs 60 to 90 days after a nesting lair is created. Mating season for the remorhaz takes place in the fall of the coming year, with all pairs separating before that time. Any adult remorhaz has a 25% chance of having a mate during this season.

Remorhaz eggs must be kept warm (60 degrees Fahrenheit or more) or they will not hatch; any egg that is allowed to cool to the surrounding, freezing temperatures and remain that cold for more than a turn will never hatch a living young. For this reason, the female remorhaz coils about the eggs to keep them warm until they hatch (three or four months later). During this gestation period, the developing young change from helpless, soft worms to miniature remorhaz, and eat their way around the thick nutrient walls of their own eggs to freedom. The young stay in the nesting lair for approximately four months after hatching, growing in this time from 1 HD at birth to 7 HD at the end of that period. Immature remorhaz will only fight to defend themselves, biting for 2d6 points of damage, fighting as 2 HD less and attacking last in a round. The young seldom leave the lair, and will be size S at hatching, M at 2-3 HD, and L from 4 HD on. From birth, the newborn remorhaz has all the powers of the adult.

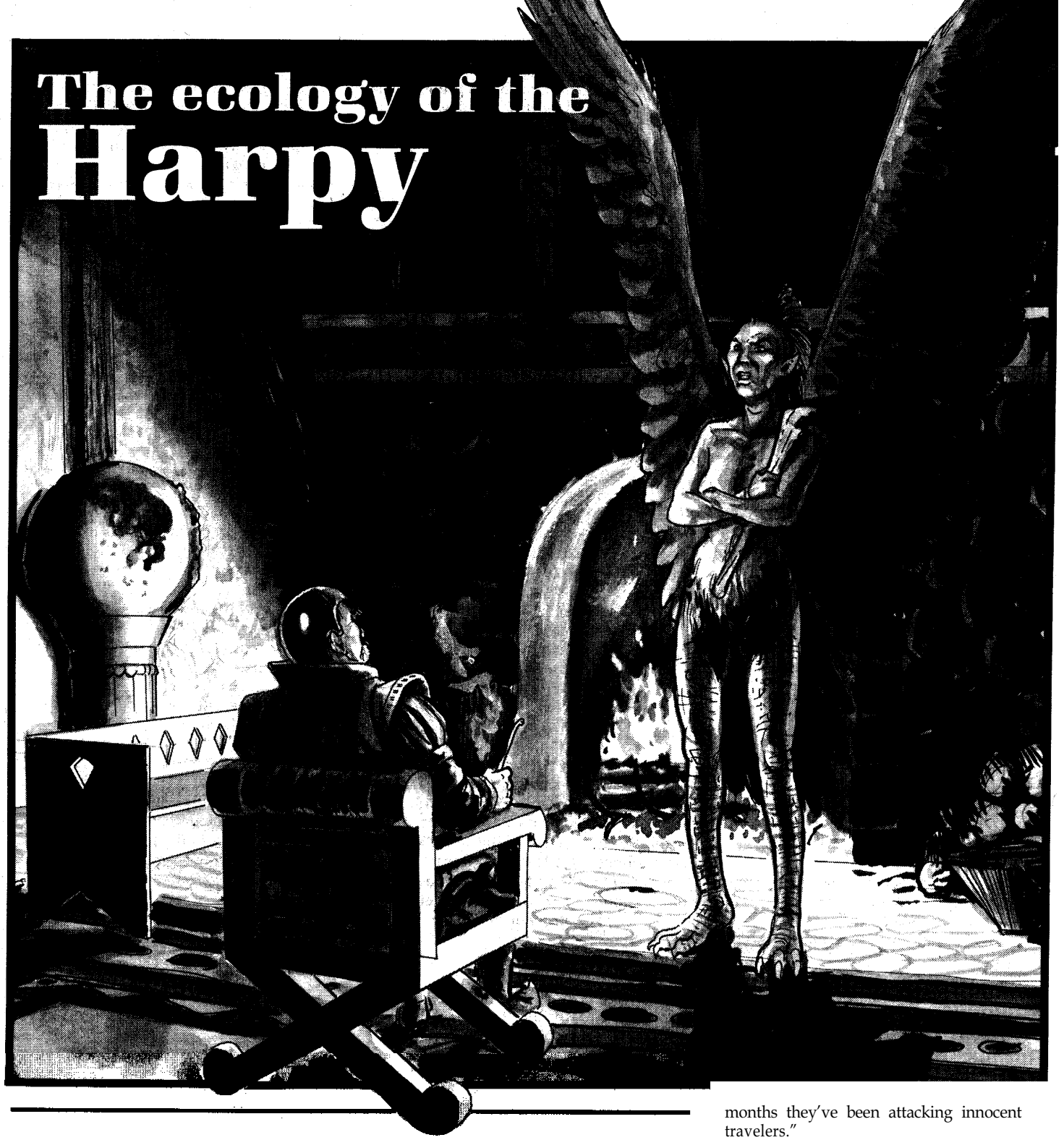
Shortly after their birth, young remorhaz are driven forth from the lair by the mother to fend for themselves, accompanying her for only a half-dozen or so daily hunts before being driven off. An adult male will leave his mate as soon as the young are born — but if the eggs fail to hatch (25% are infertile) or are damaged, destroyed, or go missing (due to predators, shifting glacial ice, and so on), he will remain patiently through one egg-laying after another until one or two live young are born. Polar worm eggs are valuable because the remorhaz make excellent guards. However, even those raised from the egg can never recognize more than one or two masters, and will attack anyone if they are hungry enough.

8. The fascinating body of the remorhaz will always reveal many useful items to the industrious. The largest specimens will yield two curving black horns the length of a man's body. These are easily hollowed out and have thus become scimitar scabbards and even unusual drinking mugs. The four sharp fangs make excellent daggers and knives, being almost a foot in length. The 28 legs are tubular in shape and very hard. They have been made into everything from canes and cups to blowguns, usually after they have been boiled to cook the succulent meat inside (a very rare delicacy indeed). The tough underskin of the beast makes excellent leather, while the scaly sections of the body make for good bucklers (they are not big enough for full-sized shields). The vestigial wings of the remorhaz are useful mostly for ornamentation, but become brittle and will eventually crumble if not immediately preserved.

In the largest remorhaz, the special stomach glands hold as much as a quart of the liquids that compose thrym. Unfortunately, few have succeeded in removing this substance from the creature without it losing its value. Though thrym requires the remorhaz's particular physiology to maintain its power, a mixture of the two chemicals after the creature's death will create a weak acidic reaction (as illustrated in the *DMG,* p. 64) — a potency that lasts for up to one day following the remorhaz's death. After this point, the individual liquids have a minor value to alchemists, who use the circulatory fluids as ingredients in the spell inks of all magics concerned with heat *(produce flame, heat metal, burning hands,* and so on), and in magics concerned with neutralizing poisons — for the fluids seem to confer upon the living remorhaz an immunity to poison. This fluid is also useful in the manufacture of potions, such as *potions of fire resistance,* and in the making of items such as *rings of fire* resistance and *rings of warmth.* Prices vary according to the scarcity of worms and differing strengths of the desires of alchemists, but are typical1y 5-10 gp per flask of each remorhaz fluid.

The cell retinae and internal fluid of the remorhaz's compound eyes are useful in the creation of *eyes of the eagle,* and in the making of special inks used to set down such spells as *infravision.* An intact remorhaz eye will bring *1-10* gp; fluid and remnants, up to 1 gp per flask.

The ecology of the Harpy



Songs of beauty. . .

by Barbara E. Curtis

"So . . . you seek something from me." The silver-haired sage chuckled to himself as he poured a cup of mulled wine for his guest. "It must be quite important, for I have very few visitors."

I don't doubt that, Colin thought, recalling the long miles of barren wasteland he had crossed to reach the sage's dwelling. It had been hard going even for a ranger. "People from the Northlands say that you've studied animals and their behavior. I need some advice. Some strange creatures have made the main road into my village their home, and for the past three months they've been attacking innocent travelers."

"Do you know what these creatures are called?" D'driand asked, his tone a bit more businesslike as he handed Colin the cup of wine and sat in the carved chair across from him.

"I think someone told me they were called harpies," the ranger said. "I've never actually seen one myself, but those few who have seen them and lived to tell of it after have said that a harpy has the face and upper body of a hideous woman, and the lower body and wings of a vulture."

"Those indeed sound like harpies, my friend," D'driand said. "Three months, you say? You might have more of a problem

than you've bargained for — they probably have claimed that area as their tribal land."

"Tribal land?"

"I had not heard that there were any harpies in the Northlands, but it's possible that they've moved north because their old hunting lands have become depleted," D'driand said, intertwining his fingers thoughtfully. "If the entire tribe has settled there, you have a definite cause for worry. An average tribe consists of fifty to two hundred members. They aren't very bright, but they're smart enough to realize there's safety in numbers."

"Not very encouraging," Colin grunted, staring into his cup. "How do you get rid of harpies?"

"Drive them away," D'driand replied. "It's not easy, but far easier than trying to kill them all off. At this point, you have one of two choices: move your village to a safer location, or show enough power that the harpies will flee. They aren't known for their bravery."

"But I think we're dealing with a very small tribe. I haven't heard of any group larger than a dozen."

"Tribes are rare," D'driand said, "but not unknown. Harpies usually exist in smaller packs, or 'screams,' and almost never hunt in groups larger than twelve. In cases of extreme necessity, however, harpies have been known to band together in small tribes. In fact, unless you had spent as much time as I have studying the harpies, you wouldn't even know they were tribal at all. Since their hunting grounds usually spread over a five- to ten-mile radius, no more than a dozen will ever been seen at one time. Their lairs are grouped together, but that's all."

"Would the village be part of their hunting grounds as well?" Colin asked.

"I'm not sure. Have any of the farmers in your area lost grazing animals?"

"Jarlath, a farmer right on the edge of the village, said that he lost about ten sheep last week."

D'driand nodded. "Just as I thought. Be careful of grazing animals as well. Harpies have voracious appetites and will eat just about anything. The road into your village probably has a lot of travelers on it daily, so it presents an almost constant supply of food. Men, women, children, beasts of burden — nothing is safe." D'driand stretched his feet out in front of him, sighed, and continued. "Harpies are strictly carnivores. Oh, I have heard that in times of famine harpies will eat vegetation, but only when meat has been unavailable for some time. They prefer fresh meat, especially that of humans, humanoids, and demi-humans. Elf is a particularly rare treat, for reasons I shall explain later. However, harpies could hardly be termed fussy eaters and will eat just about anything, including carrion."

"If they have such ravenous appetites and will attack anything to eat it, why don't they attack large groups?" Colin asked. "We have caravans passing through on their way to Rhelmar by that road, but I've never heard of even one harpy attack on them."

"As I mentioned before, harpies are generally quite cowardly and won't get into a fight they don't believe they can win."

"But there are so many females," Colin said. "I've never heard of even *one* male harpy. Do harpies live forever and never need to reproduce?"

"The males look like females; the only difference between them are the actual biological functions of reproduction," D'driand explained, taking Colin's empty cup to refill it. "Despite the fact that all harpies have the appearance of breasts on their upper bodies, that is all it is: an appearance. Harpies do not nurse their young. Instead, young are fed in the same manner as are bird fledglings. Actual roles of males and females in the tribe are identical. Both hunt and both care for the fledglings. And harpies hardly live forever — perhaps twenty-five or thirty years at the most."

"How much bigger will a tribe become?"

"A healthy female becomes fertile by the age of two and may lay as many as twenty eggs in her lifetime, though only an average of three may live to maturity. Many of the eggs simply won't hatch. If a harpy is born with any obvious deformities, its parents kill it shortly after hatching. If there are more than one fledgling in the nest, the stronger of them always kills the weaker ones. The harpies see this as completely natural; the weak have no right to live. This works in the opposite way as well: when a harpy grows too old and feeble to hunt on its own, becomes crippled or sickly, or is in any other way incapable of taking care of itself for any period of time, other tribe members kill it, for it is a burden to the tribe." D'driand handed Colin the refilled cup. "If left to nature, a harpy tribe won't become significantly larger," he added as he sat down again.

"Well, I have a pretty good idea of what they are and why they have been attacking." Colin said, pushing aside a stray wisp of dark hair. "Here's the real question: *how* do they attack?"

"If they had been forced to rely on their teeth, claws, and wits, they never would have survived very long. Whatever evil caused the harpies to be created also saw to it that they were given a unique and terrible attack. A harpy has a song that would put all the birds of the world to shame — a song that makes listeners risk life and limb to find the creature that produces such a beautiful sound. Some do resist the charm, but not many. Once they are under the effect of the harpy's song, the victim seeks out the harpy that charmed him and stays under the effect even when he sees how ugly the harpy actually is. The victim won't actually engage in combat since he does not realize what has happened, but he may try to persuade his companions that the harpy means them no harm."

"Can the charm be broken?"

"Yes; but there are only three ways I know of doing so," D'driand told him. "First, if one of the victim's companions is unaffected by the spell, he might call out to the victim and try to convince him of the harpy's intent, though there is no guarantee that this will work. The second way is for a sorcerer or holy man to cast a spell to rid the victim of the charm or the magic that caused it. The last way is to kill the harpy itself.

"In case the song didn't work, or if the person has broken the song's charm, there is another way that a harpy can charm its victim. More powerful than the song, this way makes the victim see the harpy as a beloved friend worthy of his protection. It is a magical touch that sends a powerful charm through the victim."

"Can you use the same ways to break this type of charm as with the song-charm?"

"The only way to remove this type is to kill the harpy responsible, for this charm puts a stronger hold on the victim than the song does." D'driand picked up a fireplace poker and began to stir the glowing embers. "In this case, the person will physically try to defend the harpy and thwart any attempts to kill it, so this can be a major problem. If you plan on taking a group of people to defeat them, it would be to your benefit to take those with elven blood, for they have a natural resistance to the powers of the harpy. This is why harpies find them to be such a delicacy, for elves are difficult to charm and are therefore a rare treat."

"If a person is under the effect of the song-charm and is touched by a harpy, does this strengthen the spell it has over its victim?"

"No. The power isn't cumulative. The only way for a harpy to strengthen it to that point is to break the song-charm and then touch its victim. Harpies can break the charm immediately — all it takes is for it to physically attack its victim. However, it likes to wait until there is no one around to help its victim and no chance for the victim to escape once the charm has been released. It disarm its prey first, and once its victim is completely vulnerable, it attacks and gains an early advantage."

"If people have broken the charm once, can they do it again later?"

"Not exactly." D'driand replaced the poker and carefully placed another log on the fire. "However, those who have been taken by harpy charm and have broken it themselves seem to be more resistant to it in the future. People cannot be charmed by the same type of charm twice in one battle."

Colin nodded. "Good. I think I have a good idea of how to defeat them." The ranger suddenly looked sad and stared into his cup. "Would that it was not sooner.

More travelers' lives could have been saved. One thing was very odd. A few of us ventured to find some of the missing people; we found a few remains, but apparently none of their belongings were touched."

"That's very typical," D'driand said. "Harpies do not care for treasure for treasure's sake. What use is it to them? They take only one item from each victim back to their lairs as a memento of the kill, for having many items from victims is a sort of status symbol in harpy society.

"If you went to a lair of a harpy, you probably wouldn't find much of value. Most of their victims are wayward travelers and pilgrims — people who would not have much of value in the first place, perhaps a ring or a pouch of coins. Never would you find gold, platinum, jewels, and magical items of any worth or great power. There is no reason for a harpy to prefer a large gem over a tinderbox. A harpy might take a small weapon such as a dagger that it could carry and use in flight, and may even make weapons out of the bones of victims. Most likely what you would find are worthless items: remains of victims, dung, feathers, or whatever the harpy might have dragged in for one reason or another. They aren't the cleanest of creatures."

The old man's gray eyes lit up as he rose to unlock an ornate wooden chest next to him. "I have something that might help you on your most laudable quest. It will help you far more than it will ever help me." He opened the lid and fumbled inside the chest, taking out curious objects that Colin longed to inspect but was polite enough not to touch. D'driand stood and handed the young ranger a bone scroll case. Colin began to work the stopper from the top of the case, but the sage stopped him.

"Not yet," he warned. "Reading the scroll inside will protect you and your companions from the charms of the harpies — but take care! Time your reading well, for the scroll's power does not last forever."

"I'll do that," Colin said with a grin, stuffing the case into his pack. "I cannot tell you how much I appreciate your help, and how much my people will appreciate it. But I can't stay any longer — every minute I am away is another minute for the harpies to gain their hold." He slung the pack over one broad shoulder and handed the sage a small pouch of coins. D'driand walked with him in silence to the door. As the ranger disappeared into the light fog that had settled, he waved and called back, "I'll tell everyone what you've done for them. Good-bye, and thank you!"

The sage waved back, but his expression darkened as he turned back into his home. and walked to the parlor. Next to the hearth, a winged humanoid warmed its hands by the fire. It turned and eyed the sage suspiciously, and began to speak in a garbled tongue that was filled with bird cries and twisted human speech. "What did you tell the human about my people?" she asked.

"Doesn't matter," D'driand replied, answering pleasantly in the same odd language. "I gave him a scroll that will make him completely open to your charm, Thanata. Your feathered folk will be able to finish settling in as planned."

. . . Songs of death

by Ed Greenwood

"A foul creature, the harp," Elminster said, drawing on his pipe, and made flapping motions with his hands to underline the pun. I groaned obediently (the things I do for the money!) and made sure the tape recorder was on. "It's also called the siren, you know," he added grandly.

"Oh, really?" I replied with feigned astonishment, and passed him the cookies. He took one, bit into it, and thus heartened, covered me with a fine spray of tiny chocolate chip cookie particles (thank goodness it wasn't chip dip) as he began the tale of the bard Melazzar and the harpies of Dark Crag. Here's an edited version (without the cookie spray):

Melazzar of Waterdeep, now old and respected, was once a young wanderer learning his minstrelry about the inns and taverns of the North. One fall, he was traveling with a small caravan in the deep woods betwixt Silverymoon and Triboar, and during a late night around the campfire, he drank far too much and wandered off into the trees by himself, feeling very ill. He was leaning against a tree, sweating and feeling as if he might die, when he heard a soft, unearthly maiden's call from the darkness beyond. Melazaar was astonished and listened intently; it came again, and from the fire he heard some of his companions get up and come to investigate. He crouched very still behind a tree and watched four of his fellows go right past him — and was then very sick.

When he had recovered somewhat, he followed, for the curious, haunting calls continued — from farther off in the forest, it seemed. At length, the moonlight grew stronger ahead, and Melazzar saw that there was a small clearing. About it large creatures seemed to be perched in the trees — it was hard to see exactly what in the darkness — and his companions stood in the clearing looking about, swords out and uncertain. Then a soft, feminine call came from the tree above him, startling Melazzar to no end. He stood immobile as several of his fellows came towards the tree, peering about and calling wary greetings. Then the branches above danced as something large spread wings and glided out into the clearing; and Melazzar saw other things launch themselves from the trees about, angling down towards his comrades.

"Look out!" he yelled, then. "An attack! Brorim! Helmar! They attack from the air!" and he drew the knife from his belt. From the air above came shrieks of anger and a strange snarling, spitting speech — and hurled daggers that flashed in the moonlight as they struck down the luckless Brorim before Melazzar's eyes. Helmar was more fortunate; he got his blade up and got under a tree, and his attackers circled away. Across the clearing, however, one of the merchants — a fat man called Yhelger — was dragged into the air in the grip of two of the flying creatures; Melazzar saw with a shock that he seemed not to want to resist them. Further, he saw that these monsters had the faces and forms of women, with the wings, claws, and tails of birds!

There was a flash of light in the air above the clearing, and another, and Melazzar saw that the senior merchant in the caravan, Crommor the Theurgist, had arrived. The *pyrotechnics* was of his making, and before it the creatures shrieked and flapped away. Yhelger was carried aloft with them, although Crommor was gesturing and muttering like a madman. Before the merchant disappeared above the trees, a globe of radiance grew about him from nothingness to a calm, steady glow. "Follow that light!" Crommor roared. "Head for high ground!" Helmar, Melazzar, and all the others plunged into the trees, crashing through branches and waving their blades and staves.

They soon lost sight of Yhelger, and Crommor rather grimly called off the search. They buried Brorim and returned to the camp to find the fire low. Crommor said only, "You stay up until morning, boy. Helmar, stay with him and see he stays awake. If you hear those calls again, play on your harp loud, and sing, too — anything loud, mind; just make a noise!"

The calls did not come again that night, and in the morning Crommor said, "Now we seek their lair — we faced harpies last night, and Yhelger is a dead man by now. If we do not find the harpies now — and *beware* their touch! — they will follow us and attack by night, taking us a few at a time. Come on!"

The entire band left mounts and wagons and set off into the woods. Crommor directed them towards a row of rocky crags some miles away — for that, he said, is where their lair must be. And he was right; in a rift between Dark Crag and the next one, they found ten of the grotesque

creatures, and what was left of Yhelger. The creatures rose into the air with shrieks, but Crommor's magic and the hurled weapons of the caravaners felled six harpies, and the rest fled. So Melazzar first met harpies, and composed his first ballad, which is generally considered pretty bad — but this is not surprising, considering the difficulty of finding pretty rhymes for "Crommor" and "Yhelger."

When his tale was done, I questioned Elminster closely about harpies in hopes of passing on what I could to you, and this is the result.

Notes

1. Harpy songs draw prey as follows: All creatures who hear a single call are alerted to further calls; they strain to hear more, even if asleep. Such calls are typically audible up to 190" distant; wind and storm lessens or ends their effectiveness. Upon hearing a second such call, creatures must save vs. spells or proceed toward the origin of the call. Creatures who are prevented or restrained seek to win past such restrictions, though they are not "entranced." Any fighting that occurs angers an allured victim, but he listens to warnings; if he manages to investigate the calls further, he will be normally alert. Only one person can be affected by one harpy at any one time, for this is a bond that requires some concentration on the part of the harpy. If the victim breaks the *charm,* the harpy is free to *charm* another victim. Saving throws against the lure of harpy calls are made as follows:

+6 if the allured character is a bard;

+5 if the character is affected by magical *fear* when the call is heard;

+4 if the character is experienced with harpies — having heard such calls before and found out the source;

+1 if the character has, within the last year, made a successful saving throw against a harpy-touch *charm;*

-1 if character has, within the last year, failed to save against a harpy-touch *charm;*

-3 if character is asleep or drowsy; and,

-3 if character is warned about or has never heard of harpies.

All saving throw modifiers are cumulative. Note also that creatures under the influences of *feeblemind, stun, charm,* and *confusion* spells are immune to the effects of harpy calls. This is true also of some forms of insanity; although a kleptomaniac is affected by harpy calls as normal, a catatonic is immune to them. It is up to the DM to decide which forms of insanity and mental disorder are applicable.

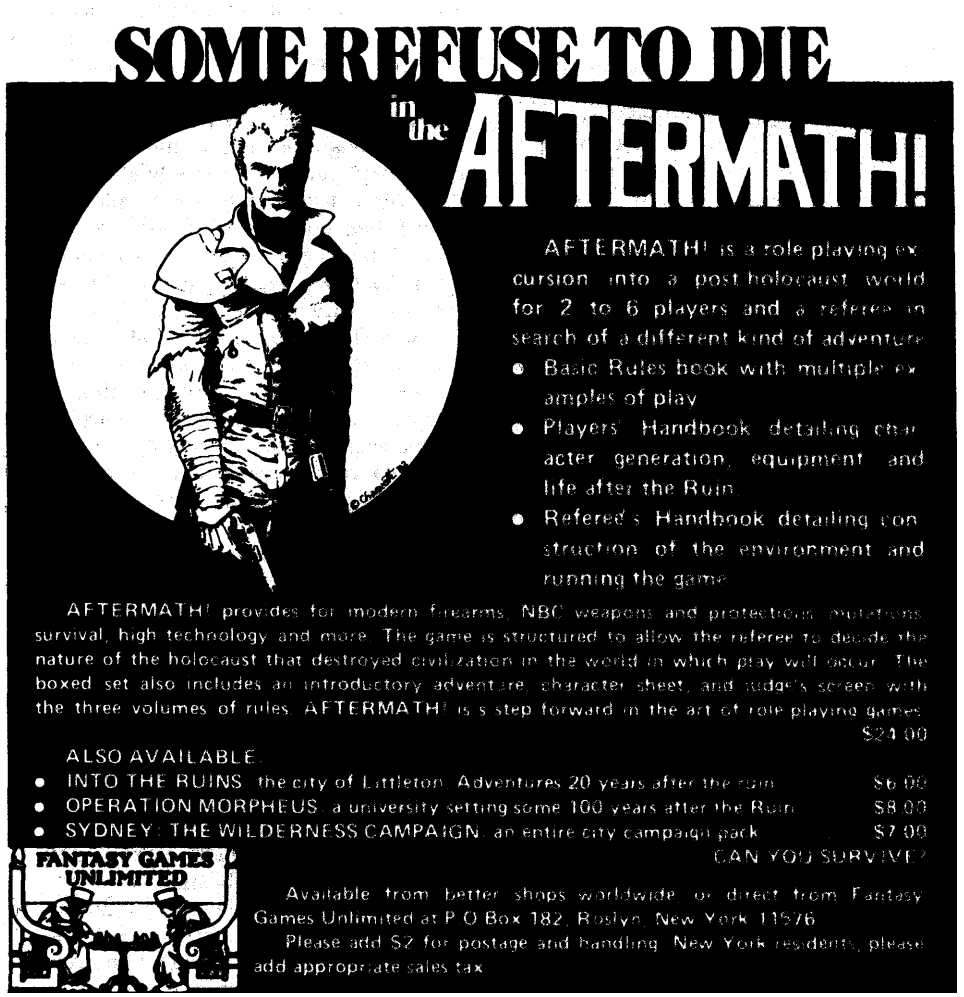
If the save vs. spells is unsuccessful against the song-charm, the victim falls under the influence of the *charm* as described above. The victim won't directly aid the harpy, for the spell cannot create that strong a bond. A second save vs. spells at -4 may be given if one of the victim's companions, not affected by the *charm,* tries to convince the victim of the harpy's intent. This can only be done once per individual affected. A *remove charm* or *dispel magic* also work.

Bards instantly realize a harpy call for what it is. A bard may have some suspicions if he has never heard the call before, since it is easy for the bard to distinguish it from human singing or calling. As a result, the bard still maintains his resistance to the call. The musical playing and singing of a bard of any level negates the charming powers of a harpy call for all who are within hearing range of the bard. Any skilled singer can vocally negate harpy calls with a 25% chance of success, since sheer volume is often enough to negate these effects. Such chances of success increase by 5% for each previous occasion upon which the singer has successfully offset the effects of a harpy's call.

In a like manner, the playing of a *lyre of building,* the legendary *Heward's mystical organ,* or any *instrument of the bards* offsets harpy calls (the player need not be a bard in such instances). Thunderclaps or sounds of battle similarly disrupt the lure of harpy calls, as does the deliberate use of items such as a *chime of opening,* any magical *biwa* or *bell,* a *ring of human influence, staff of command, rod of beguiling,* or *rod of rulership.* None of these items, however, prevent *charm* effects from a harpy's touch. A *ring of contrariness* prevents both the lure and the *charm* of a harpy's call from taking effect; a *wand of enemy detection* reveals calling harpies or harpies attempting to *charm* characters by touch. *Oil of disenchantment* breaks a harpy *charm,* but it won't prevent the lure of harpy calls.

Beings who are deafened, comatose, or in a deep sleep or trance are immune to the lure of harpy calls; as previously mentioned, beings already under a *charm* or hypnotic *suggestion* are similarly unaffected. A harpy touch *charm* breaks such existing *charms* or suggestions, but won't be useful in charming the character after that point. Nevertheless, a harpy is allowed a subsequent *charm* attempt in such cases. Use of a *ventriloquism* spell or a *potion of ventriloquism* gives a character capable of imitating a harpy call a 70% chance per round to offset harpy calls by making counter-calls in the opposite direction. This tactic always brings bewildered and furious harpies to investigate. A *silence* spell also prevents the effects of a harpy *song-charm.* Note: harpies are themselves immune to bardic or other magical, musical *charms* or *suggestions,* and their own ability to *charm* gives them a 90% magic resistance to *charm* spells cast upon them.

2. Harpies can cast *charm monster* by touch; this is an act of will and of limited natural magic, and is usable without limi-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tation. Touch-charm is more powerful than a song-charm, and is therefore much more difficult to accomplish. For a touch-charm to be successful, the harpy must get a firm hold on the intended victim — in other words, it must score a hit on the victim two points over the required "to hit" number. No damage is taken when the intent is to use a touch-charm, and a harpy may make no other attacks or actions while the *charm* is being attempted. All target creatures are allowed a save vs. spells to avoid *charm* effects by touch, and any creature that saves against or throws off a harpy's *charm* becomes immune to all subsequent *charm* attempts (whether by the same harpy or another) for 6-9 turns, as a harpy's *charm* cannot affect an aware, excited, and opposed will.

Harpies typically *charm* prey and get such prey to freely allow the harpies to carry them off to the harpy lair — typically along a circuitous route, involving short "hops" made at low altitudes, so that observers won't be able to follow the harpies to their lair. Once a *charmed* victim is in the lair, the harpy disarm him of all obvious weapons, and there is a 50% chance that it also searches for concealed weapons or other items and removes them as well. Other *charmed* victims, if any are around while this is going on, remain oblivious to the situation. Remember that the *charm* is broken once any harpy makes a physical attack upon the victim. If a person under the touch-charm of a harpy is carried bodily away by his companions before the *charm* is broken, he attempts to escape at the first opportunity to find the harpy again. The only way to remove this type of *charm* is by killing the harpy that touched the victim. If the spell is not broken, it wears off after one week.

Favorite prey among harpies include shepherds or herdsmen: once the handlers are taken care of, the livestock become easy, plentiful prey. Such disappearances are often blamed on bandits or raiding brigands; as a result, searchers and posses never expect to find the harpies actually responsible. Only when the prey is safely in the lair will a harpy attack and torture it, thus breaking the *charm.* Harpies are exceedingly cruel and enjoy inflicting pain, but many activities described as torture by survivors and observers are actually used as training lessons for harpy chicks. Under the guidance of their elders, chicks are taught the various attacks and hunting techniques employed by their species. For example, a favorite tactic demonstrated to chicks to teach them cooperation is the slaying of prey between two harpies, lifting it into midair and pulling it apart by flying in opposite directions. Other tactics include dropping rocks from above while flying and raking prey with weapons captured from earlier prey as they pass over the victim. Large or especially powerful prey is often carried to the lair under the effects of the *charm* and dropped onto the rocks below, to disable the creature before the harpy moves to close combat for its final attacks.

3. In battle, harpies often plummet and rake with their claws, but prefer to drop rocks or hurl weapons at their victims from a safe distance. A harpy lights upon its prey and bites only when the prey appears disabled or weak. A harpy bite does 1-6 hp damage; if a wound causes 2 + hp damage, it has a 3% chance of passing on a blood, cardiovascular-renal, or connective-tissue disease of an acute, severe nature (see the *DMG,* pages 13-14). Contact with harpy filth carries a 6% chance of contracting a parasitic infestation (see the *DMG,* pages 13-14). Harpies befoul only what they cannot take back to their lair; they are sloppy, filthy creatures, but they do not deliberately foul their own lairs.

Harpies always try to cripple the wings of flying prey before making other attacks (they have no desire to fight an aerial creature on equal terms), and usually screech warnings and instructions to each other during battle, secure in the knowledge that their language is obscure and difficult to translate. Harpies are dangerous carnivores, but they are essentially cowards. Many potential victims have escaped their clutches by scaring the harpies with displays of magic or a show of superior force. Harpies overcome this innate cowardice by hunting in packs known as "screams," which number from 2-12 harpies. From this hunting pack, the phrase "a scream of harpies" has been derived. Harpies have poor infravision (4″) and only slightly better ultravision (6″); in daylight, their sight is equal to that of a man, although they notice movements on the ground much more keenly when aloft.

4. Within a scream, female harpies lay eggs if their numbers ever fall to four or less. Within larger tribes, harpies pair off normally, laying eggs when the tribe decreases to fifty or less. If too many young result during hatching, the weaker harpies are slain by the other members of the scream or tribe. When strengthening the numbers of the scream or tribe, harpies lay 1-3 eggs each, once every 40 days. Only 30% of the freshly laid eggs are fertile; these eggs must be sat on to keep them warm (a task shared in rotation by all of the adult members of the scream) for 11-20 days before they hatch. Eggs that do not hatch after a month are devoured by the members of the scream. Young harpies are born with 1+1 HD, no ability to *charm,* attacks of 1/1/1-2 hp damage; and are unable to fly. The young are defended with great ferocity by their parents and are seldom molested by the rest of the scream unless they appear deformed. When harpy young are present, the scream hunts almost endlessly so that the chicks can grow rapidly and assist the scream in hunting. A chick grows to its full size and capacity of attacks, and develops skill in its use of song and power to hold prey under the influence of its *charm,* in 1d4 + 14 days. A month after its birth, the harpy gains the ability to *charm* by touch. When the young harpy finally learns to fly (a process that takes an additional week or so and is characterized by a comical series of hops and tumbles about the lair), it makes its first venture out of the lair. A harpy can always make at least a few short flying hops before it ever leaves the safety of the lair. Harpies are clumsy fliers at best, since their flight is often a matter of heavy flapping, short swoops, and quick exhaustion if forced to fly long distances. Harpies possess maneuverability class C. Young female harpies are able to lay eggs of their own after they are two years of age, and are known to live up to 60 winters in extreme cases, although their dangerous lifestyle usually warrants a longevity of 12 to 20 years. If a scream grows to more than a dozen, the group breaks into two or more units. In these circumstances, the newly formed scream only remains within the territory of the former scream if both are a part of a larger tribe. Otherwise, the weaker scream is driven from the territory to establish its own lair.

5. A harpy lair is frequently found in a chasm, in a series of caves, or in a set of ruins. When establishing a lair, harpies seek a large, sheltered area that is safe from the molestation of men, yet within range of a well-stocked supply of food. The area is usually situated so that it is nearly impossible for prey to escape from it on foot. Also, the lair is usually large enough to allow harpies to fly about inside it and has rock ledges, projections, or tree limbs to provide a perch for each member of a scream or tribe. Harpies tend to stay in the same general area (a circle approximately 30 miles in diameter or a coastal strip approximately 60 miles in length) and learn the lay of the region and its natural features so they can utilize the structure of the land to ambush prey and to escape and hide within in case of trouble.

A harpy lair is strewn with the bones of harpy prey — all sorts of creatures ranging from livestock down to large rats, although smaller prey is uncommon due to the harpy's poor sight and limited dexterity. Medium-sized creatures are a harpy's favorite prey because they are easy enough to *charm* and carry, and because they provide a reasonably filling meal. The discarded treasure of such prey (excluding weapons) are often strewn about the floor of the lair, for harpies have no use for what they cannot eat. Some harpies, however, have come to realize that the presence of large quantities of shiny metals draw more humans and demi-humans to their lairs, and thus use the materials as bait with which to trap the victim. Harpies cannot easily grasp or carry individual coins, or anything smaller than a chest, staff, or statuette. They are fairly adept at plucking at and snagging leather purses, straps, baldrics, and-the like as they flap past. ♏

The ecology of the Minotaur

by Anthony Gerard

It was on the fifth of Fishspawn, in the year 425 of the Dancing Unicorn, when my caravan was attacked and taken by a large band of orcs. Amongst this horde were several ogres and minotaurs serving as mercenaries in the pay of the orcish chieftain, Garkun Three-Fingers, who was slain in the following month in the elven lands. After the caravan's defeat, several other unfortunates and I were given over to a large bull minotaur as part of the plunder, and thus began my captivity among the horned ones.

As I, more than any other human I know, have spent more time in the presence of minotaurs, I have taken it upon myself to write this brief narrative of their lives and habits. During my captivity, I observed in detail the society (such as it is) of these bestial folk, and was able to prolong my life by using this information to its best advantage in dealing with my lord and his monstrous people.

Of their appearance

For the benefit of the masses, I shall here note the obvious. The minotaur is a large, bipedal creature; a manlike beast with a bull's head, hooved feet, human hands, and thick, wiry hair on the head, forearms, lower abdomen, chest, and lower legs. Bull minotaurs often attain nine feet in height; females are generally somewhat shorter, perhaps seven feet on the average, but of no less savage a temperament.

The lower body and torso are similar in general appearance and build to those of ogres, although hairier. Females have breasts and broad hips similar to those of most humanoid types. The minotaur's hands are massive and have thick yellow nails, which occasionally serve as claws, though they often break.

As is common knowledge, the head is bovine in appearance, but there are many differences to the careful observer. The snout is thicker and more drawn out than that of an actual ox. The teeth, particularly the canines, are large and pointed, for minotaurs are carnivores of the most fell sort and regularly bite at their enemies and prey. Occasionally, the canine teeth protrude even when the mouth is closed. The eyes are set more forward and closer together than those of actual cattle, granting minotaurs depth perception.

The head is heavily furred, with the hair color ranging from black to a light red-brown tone. Bodily hair is the same color as the head hair, although somewhat shorter and stiffer. The large, deep eyes are generally a dark brown. The horns of the minotaur are structurally similar to an ox, consisting of a horn sheath over a central bone core. Both sexes possess horns, although those of the male are larger and heavier. The horns normally curve slightly forward, although they may

be broken or bent at an odd angle from old injuries. I have heard that some minotaurs possess the tails of cattle, but those I knew had no tail at all.

The horns of a bull minotaur are his pride. Certain free moments of his leisure time are spent polishing their length with old furs or rags, or sharpening their tips with stones. The color of the horn varies with the color of the hair, although bi-color and tri-color horns are not uncommon. Dark-haired minotaurs generally have dark yellow or yellow-brown horns. The minotaurs I was among seemed to favor darker horns for cultural reasons — and to this end, they oiled and stained their horns to achieve a dark tone. The horns were often decorated in one manner or another, being often studded with decorative brass or silver tacks and spikes. I saw one minotaur whose left horn had apparently been severed by an axe blow; the horn had been rejoined and secured by an etched band of brass, through the artifices of a gray dwarf who served as the band's blacksmith.

Other than horn ornamentation, minotaurs wear little in the way of decorative jewelry. A few of my acquaintance wore studded gauntlets or waistbands, which obviously showed ogrish influence. Minotaurs are hardly above copying a style or mannerism used by other races, since they have so little to contribute on their own save their native barbarism. If a said decoration is seen to enhance one's fearsomeness, every minotaur who sees it will adopt it at the drop of a hoof.

Of their growth

Minotaurs breed and give birth throughout the year, and their society favors replenishment and increase of their numbers. A single minotaur is usually born to a cow; twins are rare and regarded as holy. By its second year, a young minotaur has fully developed horns and can fight an orc on equal footing. By its fifth year, a minotaur is larger than a man, and by its tenth year, it has attained adult size and mannerisms. Sexual maturity comes early, even by the third year in some, and breeding likewise begins quickly for them. To bear a warrior son is the highest act to which a cow may aspire; to father a great many warriors is merely another social ornament for the male.

Young bulls are tutored in the use of weaponry by their sires and other males. The youths spend much of their time wrestling and fighting among themselves, as rivalry between bulls is fostered virtually from birth. Few cruelties are spared in their battles, and the scars from horn and tooth of one's early battles with other minotaurs serve to strengthen the warlike charisma that the bulls prize so highly.

There is little maternal affection among minotaurs. A young bull shows respect to a female, even its mother, only as long as she is physically superior to him. The world of the minotaur is rooted in brutality and force of might, and females are barely more than slaves among them.

When he reaches maturity, a young bull may wander widely to avoid contact with older, stronger bulls. Solitary minotaur encounters are usually of this type. My master was fond of boasting about his exploits during this time of his life; he cared little for civilized marvels, being intent upon showing his mastery over the world at large through acts of wanton violence and destruction of the basest kind. No barbarian warlord has known the utterly bestial worship of a minotaur for that which we call wickedness.

The minotaur's lifespan may be as long as eighty years, but because of the violence inherent in their life-styles, few live to even a ghost of this age. My master was a veteran of perhaps thirty winters, past his prime but still one to be feared and reckoned with by anyone of reason.

Of their society

To speak of minotaur society is perhaps as senseless a remark as to speak of the art of the orcs, yet certain traits become obvious to anyone even crudely familiar with this species. Particular practices vary to extremes between tribes of minotaurs, being snatches of other cultures and beings, adopted by minotaurs for a short time — only to be discarded as soon as a new practice is seen. I witnessed the sudden appearance, spread, and disposal of a hundred practices during my captivity, borrowed from every source within imagination — even from mortal enemies.

Polygamy suits minotaur bulls well; a strong bull may maintain a harem of up to six or seven females. Infanticide is rarely practiced by minotaurs, save for deformed births, despite their desire for more bulls. I have mentioned their concern with constant breeding and increase of their numbers. Even the birth of twin cows (considered an evil portent by some tribes) is better than no births at all. A cow, at least, can take her frustrations out upon the slaves kept either in common or by a particular bull. I have been too well acquainted with this practice myself, though I found ways of avoiding such unwanted attentions from the harem kept by my own master. I dwell more upon the lot of slaves elsewhere.

Bull minotaurs engage each other in combat over plunder, females, positions of authority, and any other possible point of friction that may be imagined. The leader of a raiding party or the dominant bull in an area is always the largest and strongest, but not necessarily the most intelligent. In such combat, the antagonists grapple weaponless, seeking to kick, bite, or gore each other into submission or an early grave. One or both of the opponents in such a duel may end up fatally wounded —which is often what was intended by the victor. A minotaur killing another in combat typically takes the left horn of his victim as a trophy. The tip of the horn is then removed so that it can be winded in battle or celebration. Such horns are highly prized; my captor owned four.

Slaves are usually supervised by females or young bulls and are employed in enlarging and adding to the labyrinthine minotaur lair. Minotaurs are not especially vigilant in overseeing their slaves. Escapes, at least temporary ones, are commonplace. The chief recreation of bull minotaurs (when not out raiding or drinking) is tracking escapees through the lair or overland. Perhaps one slave in two makes the escape a permanent one; of the one who fails, little can be said, save that perhaps it is better that minotaurs do not share the love of torture that other monstrosities (human and otherwise) relish. I digress, but here I shall note that a minotaur regards death as a holy thing that should come quickly, cleanly, and in combat. If the opponent has no weapons, at least the fight is ended much the sooner, and the victor can enjoy the status of another kill (though it will be of little worth, as they give more honor to kills against powerful and dangerous foes). A minotaur who has slain thirty men or orcs in a battle would not be held in half the respect accorded one who killed an ogre or another minotaur fighting for the opposition.

Minotaur favor twisted mazes in places underground or in dense forests for their lairs. My captor was lord of an area commonly referred to as the "Forest of Thorns," which was reputedly once an elven woodland burned by orcs. In this place, great thorn trees, thick as a man's thigh, grow and intertwine to the the point that they block the very sun. Through this dismal wood, the minotaurs had chopped a great maze of tunnels and chambers, forming a nightmarish dwelling that seemed to have no end.

Yet, this series of passages, hopelessly confusing to a civilized mind, is navigated by the minotaur with surreal ease. I believe this ability is due largely to the minotaur's acute senses (especially the olfactory one), though perhaps an inborn trait is present which allows the minotaur to puzzle out geometry with the skill of the eldest mathematical savant of any university. A minotaur can retrace its own trail through an unknown area with uncanny accuracy, its nostrils flared and snorting at the scent that it leaves — yet I heard of a minotaur called Faceless, which had suffered a severe facial wound that destroyed any sense of smell which it must have had, but was capable of the same feat.

In armed combat, minotaurs favor weapons that kill by concussion — a crude strategy, but one appropriate to their nature. Their favored weapon of choice is by far the two-handed poleaxe. Stoutly functional, these axes are rather crudely made. During my captivity, I never saw any means by which the minotaurs might have produced these themselves; I believe they obtained their weapons in trade from orcs or hobgoblins. Minotaurs also employ

massive two-handed hammers, clubs, or flails. Occasionally, they use stout, thick spears, although only as thrusting weapons; I have never seen a minotaur throw a spear or other weapon, save in frustration.

Minotaurs prefer the company of ogres or other minotaurs. They have a grudging respect for trolls and, one would assume, also for giants. They look down on the human, humanoid, and demi-human races, making little distinction between them, save as individual combatants whom the minotaurs must fight and conquer. True monsters, like dragons, are merely opponents.

Minotaurs are exceptionally fond of alcoholic drink, especially strong "hard" liquors and wines. Three times in the company of visiting ogres, I observed my captor drink himself into a stupor that lasted for several days (as, indeed, his brutish guests did as well).

The language of the minotaur is very similar to that of the ogre. As I was somewhat familiar with ogrish, I was soon able to overcome the differences between the two tongues. Aside from their actual spoken language, there are a few vocalizations common to minotaurs alone. When enraged or excited, a minotaur bellows in a manner reminiscent of an actual bull. When pursuing prey or searching for a hidden enemy, a minotaur gives out a snort every few seconds, in an attempt to acquire possible scents.

The majority of minotaurs worship the demon lord of their kind, Baphomet, to a greater or lesser degree. A Jovite high priest has since told me that he believed them to be a special creation of Geryon from original ogrish stock, but I harbor my doubts. Other creatures mix the natures of two or more basic beasts, such as the centaur and the pegasus, yet we have no sure knowledge of how they came to be so, either. The gods will have their way. I never heard the name Geryon mentioned by any minotaur, though they freely called out the name of their own lord in curses, oaths, and taunts.

Minotaur bull-priests are easily recognized from other minotaurs. Their horns have series of crude pictograms carved into them; these "runes" are then darkened with blood, and the horn is coated with a dull yellow stain so that the carvings stand out in vivid contrast. In addition, the bull-priests have themselves painted with natural stains from earth and plant matter, and splash the blood of slain enemies upon themselves after battle. Gnoll blood is favored for some reason that I cannot explain, though some sage who has other knowledge of these beings may know the answer. Sacrifices are generally conducted in a central chamber of a bull-priest's labyrinth, usually before battle. Humans are the most common sacrifice, as they are the most easily available. It is reputed that if such a sacrifice is especially pleasing to the lord of mino-

taurs, it is consumed by a "cold flame." The passageways leading to such sacrificial chambers are decorated with the bones of previous victims in curious, intricate patterns.

Minotaur bull-priests are given some measure of grudging respect by other minotaurs, but this is always dependent on the physical strength of the priest himself. A battle horn made from a carved bull-priest's horn is highly regarded by minotaurs, so I assume the bull-priests may be slain by their fellows with the same facility as any other minotaur.

Overall, minotaurs are ignorant in the ways of magic. They are not curious, awed, or even amused by the ways of spell casters; magic is either a threat or arrogantly ignored. For this reason, minotaurs may be easily duped by even the simplest of magic, although illusions must be of the most superior sort to trick the minotaurs' keen senses. Minotaurs place no special value on magical items in a treasure hoard, although they may be aware of the items' value to other creatures. Magical items are soon traded for liquor or other prizes (unless the item is a weapon), so a minotaur's hoard rarely contains many such dweomered things.

Of my escape

For two years and two-hundred seventy-one days, I dwelt amongst these bestial creatures, and I came to know them as well as perhaps any could. I knew their smell, their curses, their triumphs, and their rage. I can close my eyes now and see my old master, doubtless now a mere skeleton on a forgotten battlefield, his offspring raiding and looting with their own savage tribes.

Many slaves were taken by my master's folk, but only I was favored enough to be kept alive, even when food was in short supply and my master's massive frame shrank from starvation. I could not have run from him, having a disabled knee from the day of my capture, and I had no muscles with which to fight him directly — but I was a student of spatial geometry before I took up my father's business and became a merchantman, and my teachers said that my ability at drafting was uncommonly sharp.

Thus, I survived by teaching my master puzzles. From the first, trembling moment when I handed that evil beast-lord a scrap of parchment with a maze drawn thereon, to the next thousand nights that followed, my life was wholly dependent upon my ability to create a fresh, new maze for my master to solve. He could not use his nose to solve it, you see, so only his eyes and brain were of use — truly a challenge for any of his kind. No man can imagine how slender a thread held me from destruction, save for my own terrorized ingenuity at creating brain-teasers, one per night, to keep that bull amused. Though he told me that he would slay me outright if any of my designs failed to challenge him, I believe that toward the end he came to be rather fond of me, and even kept other minotaurs who would have slain me for my poor meat away from my person at risk of his own life.

Such are the ways of the gods. When the scout force for Lord Darduin's dwarven legions rescued me in the heat of a pitched engagement, I had bettered my own understanding of mathematics to the highest degree, and now spend my days at this university, a teacher and scholar — and a free man.

Perhaps I should be grateful, but surely you understand if I wish it had been otherwise. When the weather changes and my knee aches, I sit and remember those days at my master's hooved feet, and wish I could forget.

Additional notes

1. Minotaurs are very adept at tracking and trailing. They have a base 50% chance to trail a man-sized creature. This base is modified upward 5% for each additional man-sized creature in a tracked group. The base is modified downward for environmental and terrain factors, or a pursued party's effort to conceal its scent trail (see *Unearthed Arcana,* page 21-22, for possible additional factors). A minotaur has a 20% chance to trail prey without the use of smell, using its other senses alone — especially its 90′ infravision. This base chance is decreased 2% for each melee round elapsed since the creature passed. The base is also modified (at the DM's option) for environmental and terrain factors.

2. Due to its keen senses of smell and hearing, a minotaur has a 20% chance to detect invisible creatures. The base chance is increased upward by 3% for each additional man-sized creature present.

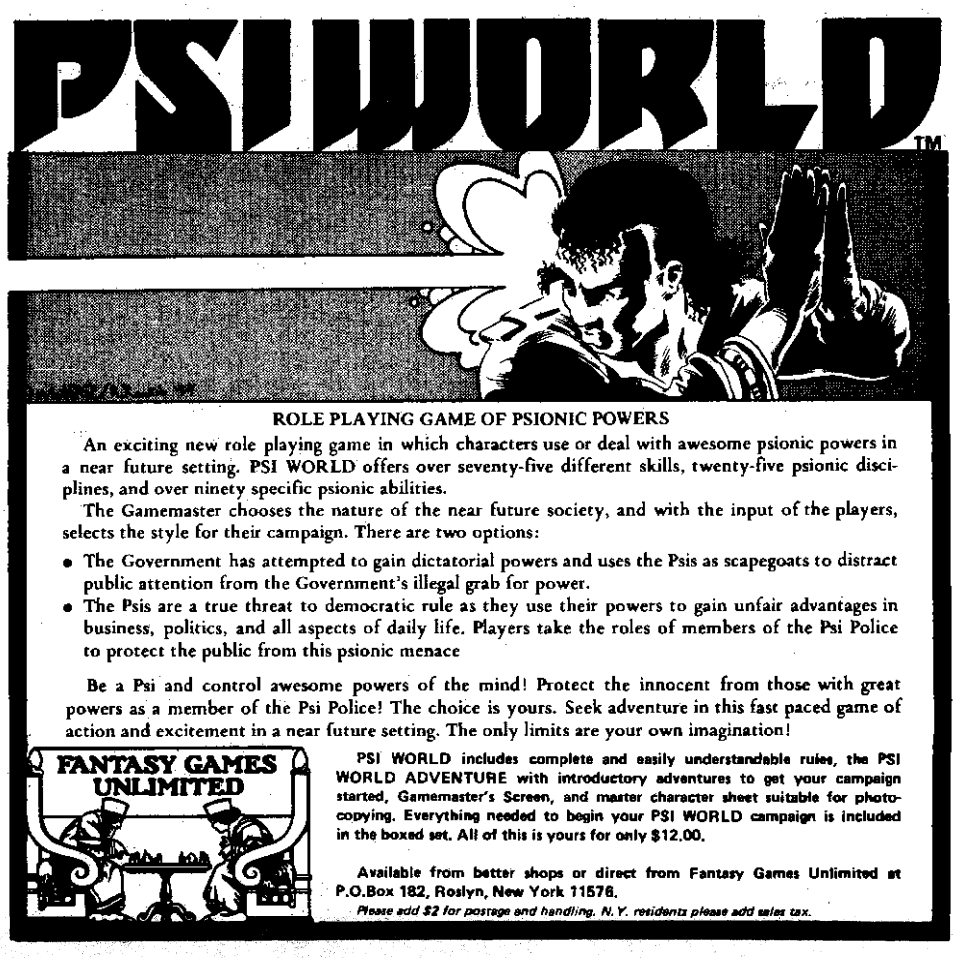
3. A base 75% chance is given for a minotaur to retrace his trail through an unfamiliar area using all senses; without the use of smell, the base drops to 45%.

4. A base 25% chance is given for an individual fluent in ogrish to correctly interpret anything said by a minotaur.

5. Minotaur clerics reach a maximum of 3rd-level clerical ability. Such clerics cannot cast healing spells. At 3rd level, they gain a spell identical to the second-level magic-user spell *strength.*

6. A minotaur's contempt of magic can work to its disadvantage. For example, a minotaur would be loath to retreat from a magic-user — even in the face of major offensive spells such as *fireball.* Its conceit for its ability would force it to withstand the blast.

7. A minotaur, in addition to biting and goring, may kick with one hoof for 2-7 hp damage or may strike out with one nailed fist for 2-5 hp damage per round.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The Ecology of the Anhkheg

Hunting down the farmers' bane

"We're ruined, your wizardship!" shouted a farmer, his voice echoing from the smoke-stained rafters. "Our lands are infested, and it's not even safe to go near the fields, let alone grow crops on them!" The angry, frightened crowd echoed his sentiments as a roar of shouting broke out across the meeting hall. It was a sea of chaos.

I closed my eyes and prayed for internal peace. *Why me?* I thought. Baron van Kirwak IV owned these lands; *he* should be here, taking command and solving this problem. I was a mere sage tied to a petty nobleman in the baron's service — hardly the wizard everyone took me for. Now I regretted putting "experience with exotic animals" down on my resume. All I had actually done at the academy was change the papers in the cages of the alchemical laboratory animals.

My eyes opened and patience fled. "I will have order!" I shouted as I stood up at the desk that had been set up for me at the front of the village hall. "Silence here! Let's have but one speaker at a time!"

I wished that I had a spell or two to cast, just to impress the crowd, but I had none, of course. Nonetheless, my voice seemed to do the job well enough.

"Alright, your wizardship!" screeched a withered, old man as he stepped forward. "There's something in our fields, and if we don't have a harvest to show the baron, he's going to kick us off our lands. Then where will we go?" The crowd murmured its concern over the question.

"I was sent here by the baron to find out what sort of beast has been plaguing you," I told him. "Then, perhaps, we can deal with the beast. Now, this thing —"

"It's a big thing! Looks like some sort of giant insect, it does," interrupted an old woman from the side of the room. "We saw it spring up out of the ground and fall upon one of our dogs, out for a run. Bit the poor thing in two!"

"Yes, but what did it look like? The monster, I mean."

"It was brown on top and pink on its underbelly," said a farmer leaning on a crutch. "I saw it the night we tried to kill it. We looked for its tunnels, like a giant mole's, near the edge of one of the fields. There were about fifteen of us, and we weren't thinking about being too quiet, as everybody with sense knows bugs don't hear, Suddenly, the ground shook a little bit, and right ahead of us, the earth opened up! The monster had us! It looked bigger than a horse, easy, and it caught us off guard. The only thing I could think about was running, and I ain't ashamed to say it, either! I dove to the side, towards the woods, and I heard the thing make a horrible hissing sound. Then something wet hit my leg, and it felt like fire! I crawled away. I could see some of the others were still on their feet, and were throwing pitchforks and the like at it. Bounced off, every one of them. Then the monster killed two of our dogs and scared the rest of 'em across the country, and the

rest of us took off for home."

I looked at the man's leg wound. From what little I could see of the wound, I judged it to be a burn. A light dawned upon me. "This monster," I asked suddenly. "Did it look like a praying mantis?"

"Nope," said the farmer. "Looked like a horn-headed devil!"

"Did not!" cried another farmer. "It was like a praying mantis, only a hundred times bigger!"

"You were too far away to see it!" shouted the injured farmer. The hall was instantly filled with heated abuse.

In the turmoil, I picked up enough conversation to confirm what I had first suspected. I got to my feet and waved my arms. "Silence! SILENCE, IN THE BARONS NAME! I have the answer! I know what monster has been bothering you!"

You could have heard a needle drop. I lowered my arms. "What you have in your fields is a beast called an anhkheg." I remembered when such a monster had been captured and brought in for study at the academy. It was big, ugly, and powerful, but stupid; we had eyed it nervously as it slammed itself against the sides of its force-walled cage. My hands grew clammy at the memory.

"They look like and are related to the praying mantis," I continued, "but they are of monstrous size and dig tunnels through the soil. They use the substances found in the earth as their food. But, when one of them is greatly disturbed, it can vomit an acid from its stomach that can dissolve rock." I looked at the farmer with the bandaged leg. "You are already aware of this weapon, of course. Though they feed upon soil, anhkhegs would prefer to get live meat — your cattle, your dogs, or your children and yourselves."

That got a rise out of them. I continued when the cries of alarm died down. "You were wrong in thinking that the anhkheg could not sense your coming. Anhkhegs sense all vibrations in the earth around them. They can detect a footfall from a field away. The lot of you going to track it down would have been easy for it to detect.

"As for killing it — an anhkheg has a tough shell, and it takes enormous force to break through it. It's as thick as plate armor. If you can kill one, you could even make a strong shield from the chitin. You'd have to treat it in chemicals and preservatives, of course. The point is that an anhkheg was built to take what it wants, from whomever it wants.

"But," — I raised a finger as I spoke — "it does have a few weaknesses. All insects hate smoke, and anhkhegs are no exception. If you had a large cage trap; you could put it near one of the openings of the monster's tunnels. After blocking the other exits, you could start huge, smoky fires in several of the exits themselves. To avoid the smoke, the monster would move down the tunnel leading right into your trap. Once captured, you could put the anhkheg to sleep by pouring a volatile liquid, such as turpentine, onto or near the beast." The anhkheg we had studied at the academy was captured in much the same way.

The farmers looked glum at that, however. "We don't have any turpentine, your wizardship," one called. "We could build the trap, but what would we do if it broke free? What if we missed a tunnel exit, and the monster came back for us?"

"We can't even wound the ankee-thing," another farmer shouted. "You said yourself that we couldn't break its skin!"

"And what if it spit at us again?" shouted the farmer with the wounded leg. "It could kill the lot of us!"

"I ain't a-gonna look for no ankee's tunnels!" shouted someone else. "Why doncha just burn the thing with your magic, your wizardship?"

It took half a minute to still the crowd again. "The baron believes that you can deal with this crisis on your own," I lied, not saying that the baron was too busy counting his loot from his recent adventuring, and cared little for concerns at home. "I was ordered to save my powers, and I must obey. But, there are other options which you might try." I was remembering more and more of that particular lecture in the academy, so long ago, when the anhkheg was brought in. "They depend upon what condition the beast is in. To take up these options, however, you must be willing to part with some of your cattle or goats, to feed the monster for a few days or weeks. This is —"

The immediate uproar revealed the town's opinion. "And what good would that do?" shouted the man with the wounded leg.

"It would keep the creature where it is, so that it doesn't roam the area! With the anhkheg satisfied for a short time, you can bring about its destruction — which you surely must, if the anhkheg is a *female."* The crowd began to fall quiet. "You see, there's but one anhkheg out there, now. Would you care to deal with a dozen?"

Silence fell like a rock. "You mean it might breed?" asked the brawny youth, his face pale.

"If you have a female, indeed it might," I told him. "In the late fall of each year, each anhkheg seeks out a partner and mates. Soon after, the female kills the male and starts preparing a nest, usually a widened dead-end of a tunnel. But the female's attacks on creatures passing nearby become more intense, because she isn't gathering food just for herself. The food is for her *brood."* The audience shivered. I had them, now, and I enjoyed it.

"When the female lays her grey, melon-sized eggs in the body of the male, she burrows into the side of the nesting lair to secure a place for the winter. The eggs hatch shortly after they're laid, and the young mature rapidly. The newborn anhkhegs feed upon the male for the duration of the snows; in the spring, the young feed on the rotting food that has been stored over the winter by the mother. The mother cares nothing for her young once they've passed that first season, and as soon as she can, the mother chases them from the nest.

"In short, if that is a female, you *must* keep the mother from roaming and wreaking even greater havoc on the countryside!"

The crowd was silent and white-faced. They waited for me to continue.

"You cannot take chances with the monster now. There are two alternatives open. The first one is to stay away from the field where it is, but occasionally send herd animals out onto the pasture, to keep the monster fed so that it doesn't wander. Then, about a month after the first snowfall, when the ground is frozen deep, you locate one of its tunnels. The anhkheg will be hibernating until spring, so you can go down into the tunnels and dispatch the beast and any eggs at your leisure. In hibernation, an anhkheg is helpless and hard to awaken, even if attacked. It will be hard to chop through the anhkheg's shell or carve off its legs and head, though picks and shovels might chop into it well enough. Long knives would be slow, but —"

"What about lumber saws?" asked the youth suddenly. He was uncommonly quick.

"Yes! Any lumber saws you have will do the job," I said, recalling some bit of lore from a ranger who visited the academy. "You'll have to work fast, and saw at it with all your might. When the anhkheg is bereft of most of its important body parts, cover it with any flammable liquid, like oil or alcohol, and light it up. Get away from it, as the heat of the fire will awaken the anhkheg if it's not totally cut into little pieces. But, provided you soaked the beast in fluid, the fire should finish off what you started."

"Why can't we just cut it up and not worry about the fire?" asked the farmer with the leg bandage.

I glanced knowingly in his direction. "There usually isn't enough room in the hibernation chamber to get all the way around the anhkheg. Never leave a monster's fate to chance."

"Mister wizard!" started the old woman who had spoken up earlier; "The winters around here aren't really cold at all, and the ground only freezes down to about a hands span. Is that gonna be enough to put that thing out there to sleep, huh?"

Oh, the best-laid plans of mice and men . . . I questioned the old woman about the weather, then sighed. "From what you say, I fear that it would be hard to predict when or if the anhkheg would hibernate. I have heard that some do not if the snows are light." Everyone's face fell at that. Arguments broke out across the room as the farmers tried to decide what to do next,

"Listen to me!" I shouted above the rising buzz. "You have one final option!"

Immediately, to my relief, the noise began to subside. This was indeed their last option — aside from hiring adventurers to destroy the anhkheg, which would cost every last copper piece these wretched people had.

"Before it settles in for a coming winter, whether it is male or female, and whether it hibernates or not, an anhkheg must shed its old skin, in order to grow larger for the next season. This period is when it's most vulnerable. As soon as it has shed its old shell, the anhkheg secretes a smell distasteful to predatory monsters and other anhkhegs. It does this so that its natural enemies stay away from it while its shell is soft." I could see questions forming on several lips, and I wanted to answer them before the onlookers could interrupt.

"Having fed itself upon live meat for a time, the anhkheg must rest, lose its old shell, and strictly avoid any activity which could deform or damage the impressionable new armor. For nearly a full week after it sheds, the shell has the toughness of a freshly tanned side of pigskin. In an underground environment, the shell dries much more slowly than it would in the air. Furthermore, the animal is sluggish as its body struggles to rebuild itself. Most of its energy is used up in the process of hardening its shell, making it slow to react. It cannot use its acidic spit, as its stomach contents are being digested to give it its needed energy.

"You must set up a watch on the field to keep track of the beast's activities, and regularly give it some sort of animal to keep it happy. When it doesn't show for a couple days, even after animals are released on the field, see if you can detect the smell it gives off to keep others like it away."

One old woman cocked her head, eyeing me thoughtfully. "Sire, a question. This smell it makes — you can smell it through the soil itself?"

I nodded. "Yes. It is quite strong."

She squinted her eyes. "And what does it smell like?"

I remembered the odor from school and wrinkled my nose. "It's very pungent, rather like rotting fruit."

The old woman broke into a toothless grin. "I was down by the field this morning, and I smelled rotting fruit real strong, but I didn't know where it was coming from. And we ain't seen that ankee for three or four days now!"

You could feel the atmosphere change as she spoke. "That may be the sign," I said. "If so, you're in luck. All you need is the courage to enter its tunnels and slay the vermin. It is in your hands!"

My voice was drowned out by a large cheer, then by loud, excited planning and talking. Within minutes, the hall was empty as the heartened crowd evaporated to go anhkheg-hunting — save for myself.

I reflected that I had accomplished my mission, but at a price the baron would not be pleased to pay. If they conquered the anhkheg, his subjects would see less use for a baron who refused to deal with monsters personally. If this kept up . . . I thought of the brawny youth with the quick mind and outspoken manner. Would I someday serve him, instead?

I collected my things. It was then that I noticed one other person in the hall with me- a girl about eight years old.

"Aren't you going to kill the anhkheg, too?" I asked her jokingly.

"Nope!" she said, her disgust obvious, "I hate bugs!"

Notes

1. In basic appearance, the anhkheg resembles a large praying mantis. This giant insect has a hard chitinous shell which covers the top portion of its body for AC 2, and a soft underside with AC 4. The hardened shell of the anhkheg appears in a variety of colors, ranging from yellow to brown to gray; the soft underside appears in various shades between red and pink. Like the praying mantis, the anhkheg has two sets of two legs each, and one set of forelegs which it uses for digging and in combat. The anhkheg also uses its forelegs to hold small prey while attacking with its mandibles.

As the anhkheg grows each year, it sheds its hard shell for another, larger shell. It is at this time of year — usually in the fall — that the anhkheg is most vulnerable. The anhkheg sheds the shell in a day or two; thereafter, it takes 1-2 weeks for the new shell to reach the hardened consistency of the former. During the first week, the anhkheg's armor class is diminished to 5 for the topside and 7 for the underside. One week after this, the shell has hardened to its normal consistency.

During this molting period, the anhkheg is very sluggish as its body struggles to cope with and adapt to the rebuilding of its exoskeleton. During this two-week period, the anhkheg's movement is half its normal rate (6" above ground). Likewise, the damage doled out by its mandibles is roughly half the normal figure (1-10 as opposed to 3-18). The anhkheg cannot use its acidic spit at this time as well. In the process of revitalizing its exoskeleton, the anhkheg refrains from digging, as this may cause damage to or otherwise deform its impressionable armor. As a result, no figure is given for underground movement during this period. To protect itself from predators or other anhkhegs (who may attempt to evict the shedding creature from its lair, or feed upon it in its weakened state), the anhkheg secretes an odor which is repulsive to these possible predators. This odor (which is the result of the anhkheg's shell-hardening enzyme) smells vaguely like rotting fruit to humans. Because of this aroma, most other creatures (except for some mammals and the most desperate predatory insects) avoid the anhkheg during this period.

The size of the anhkheg varies with age and health, and is directly related to the number of hit dice the individual creature possesses. For instance, a 3-HD anhkheg is roughly 10′ in length, whereas a 4-HD specimen is roughly 12′. This length increases in 2′ increments with each additional hit die, with an 8-HD anhkheg being approximately 20′ in length. Generally speaking, an anhkheg is half as tall as it is long; thus, a 16′ long creature is 8′ in height. As an additional note, the anhkheg's hit dice are almost directly proportionate to the creature's age. For the first six months following birth, the anhkheg has 1 HD; in the second six months, the creature has 2 HD. For every year of age following, the anhkheg gains another hit die until it reaches 8 HD, at which point the creature no longer grows. Anhkhegs usually do not live any longer than 10 to 12 years; these giant insects grow quickly and, as a result, live a relatively short time.

In climates where winters are particularly severe, the anhkheg hibernates through the cold season. Within a month after the first snowfall, the anhkheg enters its lair to hibernate. During this time, the anhkheg does not need to eat or burrow; instead, it lives off the supply of protein and nutrition it has built up in its system over the fall (part of the reason that the anhkheg is most active in its predation in the autumn). In this stage of existence, the creature can remain under-

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ground without detection for the entire cold season, returning to the surface once more when the first signs of spring present themselves. In climates where winter is not a serious factor, the anhkheg remains active throughout the year.

2. In addition to activity in preparation for hibernation, autumn is also the mating season for the anhkheg. In the late fall of each year, the male anhkheg seeks out a female partner. This search is facilitated by the female's secretion of an odor which attracts the male anhkheg, drugging the insect with its aroma. In its dazed and sluggish state, the male fertilizes the eggs —and is immediately slain by the female. Dragging the male into a widened, dead-end tunnel, the female cracks the male's underside with its sharp ovipositor and plants the eggs in its body.

The female anhkheg lays 2-12 eggs in one laying, 75% of which are fertile and will hatch successfully. These eggs, which are gray in color and about 2′ across, hatch within one month — usually before the female adult begins hibernation. During the winter months, the newborn anhkheg (known as "nymphs") feed off the corpse of the male and grow as described earlier. Within the first three to four months of life, the newborn anhkhegs take on the appearance and abilities of the adult. Within the first year, young anhkheg are able to bite for 1-4 hp damage, with an additional 1-4 hp damage per turn from digestive enzymes. They can also spit, and their digestive acid does 2-16 hp, damage, with adult ranges- In addition, the adolescent anhkheg's AC is 4 overall and 6 for the underside for the first year; thereafter, AC is as stated in the *Monster Manual.*

3. Although the anhkheg is generally an unintelligent creature, it does have some physical advantages and a few instinctive bits of cunning that aid it in its predation. As stated in the *Monster Manual,* the anhkheg burrows through the earth, preferring soil rich in minerals and organic material. For the most part, this diet of mineral and vegetation provides the bulk of the anhkheg's nutrition. Still, the insect supplements its diet with regular helpings of fresh meat (usually livestock, though sometimes humans and other accessible beings). Although the anhkheg's mandibles are not capable of tearing meat, the anhkheg is able to break down its meals with the aid of a strong digestive fluid -a fluid which it also uses in combat.

A favorite tactic employed by the anhkheg involves burrowing 5-10′ under the earth's surface and lying in wait until it detects a potential victim passing overhead. Usually, the anhkheg burrows close enough to the surface to allow its antennae to poke up through the softened soil. The anhkheg's antennae are extremely sensitive to vibration, a sense that fully replaces hearing (the anhkheg is otherwise deaf). So sensitive is this sense that the anhkheg is capable of detecting the approach of a man-sized creature from as far away as 300′; it can detect smaller-than-man-sized creatures from as far as 100′, and creatures larger than man-sized from as far away as 500′.

As an added advantage, the anhkheg has superior eyesight due to its compound eye structure — though such vision is quite nearsighted. The hundreds of small, black lenses in its eyes allow the creature to see with great clarity in gloom or at night with 6″ ultravision (this sense is lost when underground, however). Above ground, in full daylight, the anhkheg's eyesight allows it a visual range of only 12″.

In burrowing, the anhkheg utilizes its mandibles for digging, breaking down larger minerals with its digestive enzymes and moving the earth with its forelegs. The anhkheg eats as it digs, disposing of the minerals by digesting them. For the most part, an anhkheg burrows continually; the creature seldom stays in one place, unless hibernating, nesting, or waiting for prey. At all other times, the anhkheg digs through an entire area at a variety of depths and angles before moving on to another place. As a result, it is not uncommon for an anhkheg to take up temporary residence in a farmer's field or in a forest bed until it has cleaned the area of most of its nutrient-enriched soil. An anhkheg seldom burrows below a depth of 40′; below this level, it starts to meet with hard-packed soil that is both difficult to move through and distasteful to the creature; furthermore, below this point, the water table of the land makes movement difficult, if not impossible.

4. Because of the anhkheg's nomadic nature, the creature's lair usually consists of no more than a series of labyrinthine tunnels — some of which may have collapsed, others of which are still in use. For the most part, the anhkheg does not lair in any one particular habitat, except when nesting or going into hibernation. In these cases, the anhkheg usually converts a dead-end tunnel into a small lair by widening the corridor to accommodate its purpose. Nesting lairs are fairly large constructs, being 10-12′ in height, 20-25′ wide, and 60-80′ in length (room must be allotted for the male anhkheg's body in addition to the female and her young). A hibernation lair is usually much smaller, being roughly the same size as the anhkheg itself (this allows the anhkheg insulation against the cold by providing the earth as a buffer).

Anhkheg tunnels resemble a maze in their random design; although these corridors wind in relatively straight paths, they change depth, intersect with other tunnels, and often end abruptly. There are usually only one or two entrances into the tunnels, though others sometimes appear when the anhkheg bursts up from beneath the surface to surprise its prey. The tunnels are generally only as wide and tall as the anhkheg itself, about 3-6′ wide and 4-10′ high. Because of the terrain in which they are built, these tunnels are often very unstable and are prone to collapse. Consequently, characters investigating these passages should be cautious; one wrong turn, and they could wind up with an early burial.

Treasure in the anhkheg lair is usually incidental, being left behind by the anhkheg's victims and generally ignored by the insect which, because of its animal intelligence, has no desire or use for treasure. As a result, there is no such thing as an anhkheg's "hoard." Monies and magic left behind by victims usually remain with the victim's remains — that is, those items which have managed to survive the effect of the anhkheg's digestive enzymes. All belongings on a victim's body must save vs. acid in order to survive the anhkheg's acidic secretion; those that do not are simply devoured along with the victim. Any surviving accoutrements or treasures are discarded by the anhkheg; these will often be found at various points in the anhkheg tunnels. Items found are usually at the point at which the victim was consumed.

5. Because of its unique composition, the anhkheg's body provides a number of "natural treasures." For example, the hard, chitinous shell of the creature makes extremely good armor. If cured and preserved properly (otherwise, the shell withers and dissolves with time), the shell maintains an AC of 2 or 4, depending on which area of its body is used. This armor is equal to scale mail in weight and encumbrance, though it offers protection equal to that of plate mail.

The anhkheg's eyes (and the fluid therein) are useful to alchemists and magic-users in the creation of sight-related magic potions and items. Likewise, the anhkheg's digestive acid can be salvaged and utilized as a regular acid. This chemical maintains its properties for up to six months after the anhkheg's death, delivering 1-4 hp damage and limited as listed in the rules regarding acid in the *DMG,* pages 64-65 and 80-81. This chemical can only be carried in a glass container and is highly susceptible to breakage as a result.

There is a secondary enzyme sac located in the creature's head, very similar to a small, acid-resistant bladder. Recovering this fluid from the anhkheg requires very adept hands, as it is very easy to break this sac accidentally. Failure to successfully remove the sac without breakage results in damage to the handler.

Aside from this, the anhkheg's mandibles make reasonably good axe-heads, and its legs (if cured and preserved) may be used as maces and other concussive weaponry. By removing out the meat inside and replacing it with some substance to provide weight (sand, metal, etc.), these appendages can be formed into weapons delivering the same damage as their counterparts.

Gaming notes by Robin Jenkins. Ω

The Ecology of the Korred

The wild lives of the Dancing Folk

by Ed Greenwood

In the northern Realms, the tale of Olithard's Tune is well-known and often heard around a taproom hearth or barracks-board, when the night is old and the drink running low. Elminster tells me he lacks the proper storyteller's flair, and I can't even come close to *his* melodious voice and the perfect mimicry of various beast calls and accents he used, so here's a bare-bones summary of the tale:

Olithard was an indifferent bladesman and a capable but half-hearted thief — who longed to become a bard. His tongue was nimble, his wits quick, he could carry a tune, and he loved to pipe airs on his flute. Often, he sat in gardens or woody glades and piped for hours, lost in thought, barely noticing the occasional curious stare, copper piece, or kick aimed his way, He dreamed of entrancing courts and serenading ladies by moonlight with a magical harp, being called on by kings to write the lays of their lives, being looked up to by other harpists, and having his name writ in the Roll of the Remembered after he was gone. "That song was written by the great Olithard," he often said to an imaginary audience as he set down his flute. Yes. He would be a bard, and a great one.

When he at length scraped together a fistful of gems (enough, he hoped), he set out from Silverymoon south into the vast forests, seeking a college of bards that he had heard of, determined to learn all the old songs and how to play the harp. He walked alone, awed by the beauty of the woods but unfamiliar with their ways — and was soon hopelessly lost. Weeks passed as he wandered in the unending shade, until he lost track of his journey days.

One night he sat playing his flute while he pondered (for he was too naive to fear attracting attention to himself), when he found his song answered. He was playing along, working harmony, before he fully realized that another flute was being played nearby!

He trilled, and the other flute answered, echoing his own. Then it piped short, sharp, rapid calls, like an anxious bird — followed by silence. Olithard matched the piping, and was answered again, a little faster. He stayed with the unknown piper this time, faster and faster, falling into a rapid, swirling rhythm of little runs and slurs. The tempo picked up again, and another piper joined in. Olithard thought with leaping hope that he had stumbled upon the bards he sought, and played on like a man possessed, as more pipers joined in and the music rushed its crazy tune to pounding speed. Olithard's head swam, he breathed in hoots and gasps, and his fingers hurt and yearned to fall off — then the music rose into one eerie shriek and ended. Panting, Olithard let fall

his flute, head spinning, exhausted — too exhausted to run when suddenly he was surrounded by bearded, grinning faces — belonging to cloven-hooved creatures no higher than his belt, with blue-black hair hanging in wild manes all about their heads. He groaned as the weird creatures loomed over him, cudgels in hand, and fell into darkness.

When he awoke, with a splitting headache, it was morning. Of the horrible creatures there was no sign — but in front of his nose was a pile of gleaming gold shears, daggers, bowls, and coins. Atop the pile was his flute. And scratched in the dirt was an arrow and the words: "Silvery-moon — go."

It is generally agreed that Olithard (who went on to become a respected and skilled songsmith and bard) met with a band of dancing korreds, the strange "dancing folk" of the forests. Little is known of them, but I put Elminster to work and have boiled his findings down to the notes below.

Korreds are curious folk indeed to humans, who tend to lump them together with the fey, dangerous creatures of the woods and wilderlands (like satyrs, grugach, leprechauns, and pixies) that are best avoided. This is wise policy, for korreds dislike and fear intruders, and entrap them (usually in deadfalls, pits, and snares, but sometimes in ambushes — then, korreds favor rocky places where they may use stones as both weapons and shields through use of their spell-like powers over stone). Intruders who are favored, who are considered dangerous to harm because of retaliatory consequences, or who are obviously harmless are carried away to some lost, remote place and set free (usually separated from captured companions, if any). Captives are always shorn of their hair, which the korreds use to make ropes (see below).

Korreds prefer to live in woodlands or rolling, rocky, forested country, and dwell in well-hidden underground caverns and lairs, which they can literally seal off whenever intruders come near. If intruders persist, the korreds magically dig themselves away from the area without ever emerging aboveground. It is very rare for the precise location of such a lair to be divined, because there are always guards posted to watch for intruders. Korreds may dwell in colonies of up to a hundred, but almost always a hunting band of 1-4 adults is encountered, for these range far afield in search of food. Female korreds, like female dwarves, are bearded and maned with hair, and are difficult to distinguish from the males (although a korred can readily tell the difference). Korreds trap small game with animated hair-snares and club it to death, and slay bigger game by animating rocks as weapons. Korreds pair to have a child and remain together until birth is imminent, whereupon the mother-to-be literally "goes to earth." There she is fed by the hunting of others as she rests underground until the child is born. In large communities, elders take care of the young korreds and educate them, and the mothers return to hunting. Korreds may pair with several other korreds over the years to produce various children, or remain together in a stable pair. Korreds often do not hunt or live directly with their chosen mates.

Korreds are primarily hunters and fishermen, using magical nets of woven hair in lakes, coastal waters, and rivers or mountain streams. They also collect the edible fungi of the deep caverns as a staple, and gather woodland berries of all sorts to mash and ferment (in large stone vats) into a potent red wine.

Korreds are independent, but all obey without question the commands of their god, Tapann (see below) and his servitors — Jambul, Hrressek, Tishlun and Bresk are four of the most famous of these. They also respect and revere the thoughts and advice of community elders, but are only punished for disobedience to elders if such disobedience seriously and willfully endangers other korreds.

Korreds worship Tapann, the eldest and wisest of korreds — Tapann the Undying, the Father of the Dance — but they do not have an organized priesthood with shamans, clerics, or spells granted by Tapann. Instead, once every seven days (or more often in times of gratitude or need), communities of korreds worship Tapann together through dance.

Korreds dance in solitude as a form of self-calming and relaxation, or in asking Tapann for a sign to guide them in making a decision or plan, but once a week they gather with all other korreds in the vicinity and join in a religious, magical "circle dance." Korreds unable to dance due to infancy or infirmity are carried along to observe.

A circle dance is performed in a woodland glade, clearing, or hilltop, or where there are none to be found, in circles created by raising stones of great size to stand in an open circle. The circle may be of any size, depending upon the number of korreds, and the dance is performed to the music of the slap-drum (an instrument of hide stretched over a circular frame, struck with a fist or open hand) and bone flute (hollow bones holed so as to produce a variety of tones when differing combinations of holes are covered with the fingers), and the humming and exultant wailing of the korreds themselves (the korred musicians always dance unless physically unable). The dance begins casually and builds as more korreds join in and the tempo and noise increase. Elder korreds of a community serve as leaders, and after casual, free-form beginnings to the dance, the dancers begin to move in unison, following the leader's movements with (to human eyes) uncanny precision, building to a wild frenzy that always ends with a unison shout (often heard echoing across wastelands at night by travelers) and a collapse to the ground. After a time of rest, the dancers usually dine on berry

Contents of a korred pouch

Item	Chance of finding in pouch
Hair (of various creatures and differing quantities)	80%
Shears* (of iron, steel, bronze, or silver-plated iron)	70%
Dagger* (varying quality and makes)	30%
Whetstone* (rough, irregular)	90%
Skin of water, 1 quart	96%
Skin of berry wine, 1 quart	40%
Berries, 2-6 cups	50%
Berry bowl, wood or stone*	99%**
Meat (various sorts)	30%
Cheese (goat's or cow's)	10%
Coins* seized from captives (1-20, all types possible, usually mixed types)	10%
Gems* (cut, 1-6, all types possible, seized from captives)	3%
Gemstones* (uncut, 1-12, all types possible, found in rock by korreds)	35%
Slap-drum (circular wooden hoop covered with stretched hide)	52%
Bone flute (hollow bone pierced with finger-holes)	73%
Leather thongs, 1-4 in number, up to 3' long	62%
Hide (cured or uncured, one large beast, uncut)	22%
Hide (cured, small scraps or complete hides of small creatures	53%
Bone needles, 1-6 in number	19%

* Potentially of alunrum (33% chance)
** (100% if berries carried)

wine and the roasted flesh of livestock or forest creatures such as bear, deer, and wolf, slain by bands of korreds hunting or animating rocks as deadfalls.

The circle dance drains vitality from korreds; indeed, aged or mortally injured korreds strive to "dance to death," considering it an honor. Each turn a korred dances, 1 hp is lost — and even more is lost (1 hp/round) from non-korreds who join the dance (including captives). This life-force is used to raise a *sending* to Tapann, who may appear to aid his people by healing the sick, advising korreds, fighting for them, or working with them. (Forest folk such as satyrs, pixies, brownies, and the like are drained by a circle dance as korreds are, not at the greater rate suffered by non-woodland creatures.) There is a base 4% chance that Tapann will appear at the "shout" of a circle dance (8% if more than 66 korreds are dancing in unison). If a korred is slain while in a circle dance, Tapann is 33% likely to appear; destruction of the circle by moving or destroying a stone or stones (or causing a tree to fall into the glade) adds a further 5% probability of his appearance. Unless prevented from doing so, korreds always bury any korreds who die or are slain at a circle dance.

Korreds speak their alignment tongue, common speech, and usually a smattering of other woodland tongues (brownie, centaur, dryad, satyr, sprite, sylph) and dwarvish or gnome. Tapann and his servitors can employ *tongues* at will. Korred have an average strength range of 19-21 (typically 20); elders have a strength of 19. Their intelligence range is 11-12 (elders usually have 13).

TAPANN ***("The Horned Dancer" or "The Horned Leaper")***

Lesser *god*

ARMOR CLASS: *-4*
MOVE: *16"*
HIT POINTS: *260*
NO. OF ATTACKS: *1*
DAMAGE/ATTACKS: *2-12 (plus strength bonus) or by weapon (plus strength bonus)*
SPECIAL ATTACKS: *Laugh, rock throwing*
SPECIAL DEFENSES: *See below*
MAGIC RESISTANCE: *50%*
SIZE: *M (6' tall)*
ALIGNMENT: *Chaotic neutral*
WORSHIPERS ALIGN: *Chaotic neutral (korreds)*
SYMBOL: *Laughing mouth*
PLANE: *Limbo*
CLERIC/DRUID: *30th-level cleric/ 16th-level druid*
FIGHTER: *15th-level fighter*
MAGIC-USER/ILLUSIONIST: *16th-level illusionist*
THIEF/ASSASSIN: *Nil*
MONK/BARD: *Nil*
PSIONIC ABILITY: *II*
S: 22 (+4, +10) I: 20 W: 17
D: 25 C: 25 CH: 19 (25 to korreds)

Tappan appears as a 6'-tall male korred, bearing a cudgel. He wears a rough tunic of bearskin or owlbear hide, a belt, and a pouch containing locks of his own hair, a pair of silver shears (damage 1d8, plus strength bonus if wielded by Tapann), and 2-6 steel vials of *holy water.*

Although his abode is a hill studded with standing stones in Limbo, Tapann spends much of his time on the Prime Material Plane, for he may journey thence whenever he hears the hooves and music of korreds dancing in worship. He actively aids his people on many occasions and may fight with his shears, his cudgel (damage 1d12, plus strength bonus), or bare hands to aid them — although he prefers to utilize certain magical powers, primarily his *laugh* (usable at will, but Tapann can never *laugh* on successive rounds, so that each *laugh* is preceeded and followed by a round in which he does not *laugh),* which causes creatures within 9" to be *stunned* (0l-60%), *feebleminded* (61-71%), affected by *reverse gravity* lasting two rounds (72-82%), or (83-00%) as if by an *Otto's irresistable dance* spell for 3-8 rounds (save vs. breath weapon at -6 to avoid these effects). Creatures caused to dance by Tapann's *laugh* cannot move about but are forced to remain, dancing, within 1" of their location when affected. Tapann may also weave any strands of hair not attached to a living creature into a rope, and animate such a rope, within one round. All animated ropes obey his will, even if they are enchanted ropes normally under the command of another creature, and he may command any number at once. If Tappan so wills, the touch of a rope can cause a creature to suffer effects identical to *Otto's irresistable dance* for 2-5 rounds. Beings who save vs. spells at -3 may avoid this effect. Note that Tapann can employ such ropes to trip, constrict (cf. *rope of constriction),* entangle (cf. *rope of entanglement),* whip (cf. *Quaal's feather token: whip),* bind, or otherwise hinder opponents.

At will and by touch, Tapann can *consecrate* water and cause *faerie fire.* He can also use the following abilities at will, one at a time and only once per round: *stone shape, animate rock, stone door* (unlimited teleportation and intraplanar if desired; up to a dozen living creatures can accompany Tappan unharmed on such a journey if he wishes), *shatter rock, vanish* (up to 666,000 gp weight) rock (stone is transported to the Ethereal Plane and replaced by air), *transmute rock to mud,* and *stone tell.* Tapann regenerates 2 hp damage/round, and can (by touch) *heal* himself or another creature once every two turns. He can also transmute all non-organic matter to "alunrum," a substance which becomes gold at the touch of *holy water,* and does this as a matter of course to all items left in the centre of a circle-dance ring if he appears. (Creatures to be healed are also placed by korreds in the center of the dance circle.) Korreds use this gold to trade with dwarves, sprites, and other such creatures to obtain clothes (used as dancing finery), shears, some foods, and certain services — or, in a pinch, to bargain for their lives. Such *transmutation* is usable by Tappan once per turn, and affects up to 666 gp weight of non-organic matter (such as metal). Tappan or his servitors can *enchant hair* at will, so that it obeys the will of the last korred to touch it, for 1-6 rounds after activation (being magically consumed at that time). The hair of any creature suffices, and the hair can be carried for decades, if need be, before a korred weaves it and works his or her will on it to bring it to animation.

Korreds of unusual bravery, strength, and loyalty to their people are *raised* or taken by Tappan to Limbo to be his personal servants. Such korreds (usually 6-14 of them) gain the ability to *laugh* seven times per day and regenerate 1 hp of damage suffered, every second round. They guard Tapann's abode in his absence, and he may bring up to a dozen of them with him when he appears on the Prime Material Plane, to aid him in battle or in assisting korreds. Tapann is immune to the effects of a *laugh* by one of his servitors, and can strip all powers at will from servitors who misuse them. If physically threatened, he can also shift his anima (self or spirit) to one of these servitors and possess it, adding its life-force (hp), memories, and intelligence to his own, so that it becomes Tapann. He can do this despite intervening distance or planar separation.

Tapann glories in the natural rhythms of living things, their celebration in dance, and both admires and cherishes skilled and acrobatic dancing on the part of any creature. Ω

The Ecology of the Picklebug

Avoiding a "pickle" with this dangerous cuke-alike

by Rick Reid

Sominyx sat in his favorite cushioned chair, staring dreamily into the fire. His long, ivory pipe, grown quite cold during his meditations, was still firmly clamped between his yellowed teeth. A long, gnarled finger, ending in a curved nail, lingered on the last passage Sominyx had been reading in the ancient tome resting on his robed lap.

BLAM! BLAM! BLAM!

"Open up, quick! 'Tis I, Pustule! Hurry! It's trying to kill me!" came a muffled shout from the front door.

Sominyx's eyelids flickered at the interruption. Casting a bemused glance at the thick, wooden door, he shook his wizened head, chuckling softly to himself. "Ah, the impatience of youth," he sighed.

BLAM! BLAM! BLAM!

"Hey, Sominyx! I'm not kidding! It's right behind me!"

Slowly, the wizard elevated his ancient form from its comfortable resting place and picked at the few specks of lint that had accumulated on his robes. Then, noticing for the first time that his pipe was out, he reached for a thin taper with which to relight it. The pounding continued in the background.

BLAM! BLAM! BLAM!

"Aaargh! It's killing me! Help! Help! Aaaarrrghhh!"

Taking a deep draw on his newly sparked pipe, Sominyx turned and shuffled toward the door. As his hand reached for the bronze latch, he stopped and caught himself. "It was a rather chilly night," he mused. Perhaps a shawl would be needed to protect his old bones from the chill that was sure to invade his sanctuary when the portal was opened. "Now where did I put that silly thing?"

Blam . . . blam . . . blam . . . .

The knocking and shouting had grown softer now; a few feeble raps were interspersed with muffled cries for help. The wayward shawl recovered, Sominyx bent to the task of opening the door. As usual, the door stuck. "One of these days," he said aloud, "I'll have to oil these hinges." Finally, the stubborn mechanisms broke free, and Sominyx found himself gazing on the sight of young Pustule, lying face down on the front stoop with a hideous creature towering over him.

"Shoo! Shoo!" Sominyx gestured, tossing a ***power word,*** kill spell at the monster. "Didn't anyone ever teach these creatures any manners?" Then, gazing down at his bloodied visitor, he remarked, "Well, my impetuous friend, are you going to lie there all day or are you going to come in?"

After Pustule had settled into one of the wizards tackier pieces of furniture and was given a lemon to suck for his pain, Sominyx began his dissertation,

"You know, I was just reading about a most remarkable creature, before you so rudely interrupted me — a curious insect called the picklebug."

"Ohhh," Pustule moaned. "Ya got any ***potions of healing*** laying around?"

"As I was saying, the picklebug begins its life as an egg, laid by the female of the species on the leaves of the dill plant."

"Yeah, yeah, that's great. But what I need to know is, what was that thing that attacked me out there?"

"Oh, that," Sominyx replied, obviously displeased at the interruption. "Just your ordinary garden-variety xaren."

"A xaren!" Pustule gasped, spitting forth a once firmly attached molar. "What in the heck is a xaren?"

"As I was saying," continued Sominyx, pointedly ignoring his battered companion, "the picklebug survives in this egg stage, sometimes for many months, until the dill is picked for the manufacture of pickles. The eggs, being quite small, are not noticed by the picker. When the egg infested dill leaves are introduced into the vinegar-brine pickling solution, the eggs begin to hatch into larvae. The larvae, resembling small green hair, feed on the pickling fluid and begin the first step toward becoming mature picklebugs.

"Picklebug, shmicklebug! Who cares!" cried Pustule angrily. "Listen! This creature ate my magic shield, sneered at my ***ring of fire,*** and acted like my sword only tickled. What I gotta know is this: How can I kill these things?"

A withering glance from the venerable mage silenced the young fighter. "Once safely secured in a pickle barrel, the larvae continue feeding until, after a span of six months, they become adult picklebugs. In color and appearance, the insects resemble the regular pickles swimming around them, while their size is that of young gherkins."

"That's fascinating." Pustule remarked. "Totally fascinating. Look, I won't take up much of your time. Please, just tell me how I can kill a siren."

"That's *xaren!*" Sominyx spat. "As usual, you weren't paying attention. Now, once the picklebug reaches the adult stage, it begins to feed off the pickles themselves. They say an adult picklebug can consume two quarts of pickles a day. But here comes the good part. What happens when someone reaches into the picklebarrel and accidentally grabs a picklebug instead of the intended pickle? Why, nothing! Picklebugs are actually quite harmless, and are, in fact, rather tasty!"

"Ah, yeah," said Pustule, painfully rising from his seat. "Listen, isn't that my cleric calling me? Well, gotta go."

Sominyx watched with a cocked eye as the black-and-blue warrior slowly opened the door and stepped out into the night. "Hmmmph!" the wizard muttered. "These youngsters; always in a hurry! Couldn't even wait long enough for me to tell him the one thing I do know about xarens — they usually travel in pairs."

The scream lasted only a few moments, until it was borne away on the night wind. Reaching into his vest pocket, Sominyx produced a pouch of tobacco and refilled his pipe. Slowly, the old mage settled back into his chair to continue his reading. **Ω.**

The Ecology of the Gas Spore

Not a beholder, but bad nonetheless

by Ed Greenwood

From the journals of Shulheddin, Master Thief, founder of the "Soft Hands" Brotherhood:

"… Kedulkin, who was always the eager one, claimed the right to descend first, since it was he who had discovered the shaft. If it was indeed a way into the Lost City, there would soon be treasure enough for us all, and so we agreed. Taking a deep breath of fresh air, Kedulkin drew one of his throwing blades and a dropline, and vanished through the opening without fanfare. The fighting-men crowded close around, trying to peer down into the gloom, but Mairclyn and I were too cynical to stay that close, and too old to be taken by surprise from behind in such lawless country. We were eyeing the tumbled rocks all about with ready weapons when there came the muffled thud of an explosion beneath our feet, followed by startled cries from the warriors. Kedulkin made no sound as his body, tangled with the rope, was flung high into the air like a child's doll, coming down to sprawl torn and lifeless on a high rock. Mairclyn and I were well away on the next rise when the fighters began stumbling about in a spreading yellow cloud of spores, coughing and crying out. Some were blinded, some shivered uncontrollably, and all seemed dazed and witless. We decided to leave that place ere a breeze came up to carry the spores our way. . . "

From the *Bestiary of Creatures Strange and Wonderful,* a tome of unknown authorship presently in the library of Piergeiron's Palace, Waterdeep:

"One of the deadliest deceivers in nature is the *aniatha,* or gas spore, a creature which precisely resembles the dreaded beholder. If an aniatha is struck and pierced, it explodes violently, injuring all within seven paces or so. Here follows all that is presently known of the true nature of this odd and hazardous creature.

"An aniatha is a large, mobile, fungoid plant of unusual sophistication. It derives energy from visible light, particularly sunlight, and feeds on other plants to gain chlorophyll (necessary for this process) and cellulose (which it uses for structural growth and repair). In this, it is no different from the luminescent "crawling nightmoss" and other ambulatory fungus growths found in the forests and thickets, and it is just as unintelligent. But an aniatha has the unusual natural ability of ***levitation*** and floats slowly about, turning so as to absorb the maximum amount of light in the vicinity — sunlight, if above ground, or torchlight or phosphorescence if in subterranean regions. Areas of ***continual light*** radiance often serve as underground lairs for gas spores. The false eye

of an aniatha (so-called because of its external resemblance to the central visual organ of a beholder, whose magical powers the aniatha does not share) is indeed an eye, which is sensitive to all light and enables the creature to orient itself so as to gain the maximum possible available light, identify food, and navigate through its surroundings.

"The gas spore also has 10 tentacle-like arms which resemble a beholder's eyestalks. These arms, sometimes called rhizome growths, are actually the feeding organs of the gas spore. With them, an aniatha sucks molds and lichens from rock walls, leaves from treetops and aerial plants, and duckweed or pond scum from the surface of pools of standing water. The arms also help the aniatha "walk" delicately along rock walls, tree trunks, and the like, keeping the central body of the gas spore from injury against such obstructions. Under certain conditions, the arms also discharge rhizomes. Gas spores often group together where food and light are plentiful, but they have no apparent intercommunication, and never attack or feed on each other.

"The danger to adventurers lies in the aniatha's asexual means of reproduction. The interior of a gas spore is a hollow cavity filled with gas, in which a cloud of rhizomes is suspended (in whirling motion), nourished, and protected. These reproductive spores are produced on the interior surface of the gas spore and released into the gas storage bladder when fully developed. Here, they whirl at a constant temperature and pressure, until a tentacle of the gas spore touches the flesh of a warm-blooded mammal of gnomish or greater size (for such are the aniatha's minimum needs for a reproductive host creature). Upon such contact, the flexible tentacle exudes moisture to create a temporary airtight suction-seal with the flesh of the mammal, and a jet of rhizomes is expelled through the hollow tentacle, where they stick to the hapless victim's skin, thus infesting the mammal. The tentacle constricts to pinch itself shut at its base (within the spherical body). The creature then withdraws from the mammal. Adventurers report that severing tentacles does not cause the central body to leak or explode.

"Warm-blooded creatures of sufficient size are located by a gas spore's infravision. The aniatha will pursue such a prospective host until the creature is contacted or until pursuit is ended by the disappearance of the creature, by a barrier, or by the availability of other food. (Being unintelligent, an aniatha will break off pursuit immediately to ingest plant material.)

"Unless the rhizomes are destroyed by magical means, an infested host creature dies, sprouting 2-8 gas spores from its body. In the last few hours before their emergence, the growing spores eat away and absorb surrounding bodily fluids and tissue material, leaving only the empty husk of the host.

"If the tough, fibrous epidermis of a gas spore is ruptured and its gaseous interior contents are mixed with air, it will explode, as mentioned earlier. Accidental contact with branches, rock, flesh, and other obstructions rarely splits an aniatha's skin — it must be pierced by a thorn, spike of rock, or the cutting edge of a weapon or similar object in order to rupture. It is the violent reaction of the gas spore's internal gas with air — "a mere accident of nature," as the eminent naturalist, Gessage of Neverwinter, puts it — that makes the gas spore infamous and dangerous. It is thought that the tiny jet of gas exposed to the air when rhizomes are ejected at an intended host does not explode because it is chemically altered by cells within the tentacle, so as not to react with air. There is certainly no truth to the belief that a gas spore must die (that is, explode) to reproduce.

"Any aniatha that lacks sufficient food and energy to remain fully active will hibernate, floating motionless or drifting aimlessly in air currents with its bodily processes halted, eye closed, and tentacles curled in upon itself. Such suspended hibernation can last for centuries, until nearby light, heat, noise, or movement revives the gas spore. Truly, it is a curiosity of our world, if not a sentient creature proper in the sense that others in this bestiary are."

Notes

1. The explosion of a gas spore does 6-36 hp damage to all beings within a 20′ radius (half damage if a saving throw vs. wands is made). Warm-blooded mammals within this range must also save vs. poison at +3 to avoid being infested with rhizomes (see note 5 for effects). Any creature in direct contact with an exploding aniatha (i.e., touching the aniatha physically or with a held weapon) takes full blast damage with no saving throw, but saves normally versus rhizome infestation due to the force of the blast, which tends to drive most rhizomes past the victim. This saving throw versus rhizomes represents the possibility of being infested at any time while a character is within the spreading, dissipating spore cloud — creatures remaining in the vicinity need not roll for a saving throw each round.

2. A gas spore's levitation is a natural, spell-like ability, and is *not,* as is popularly believed, linked to buoyant internal gases. Instead, this ability is the result of an independent power which is not fully understood at present. In this way, the gas spore's ***levitation*** is akin to that of the beholder, and it is perhaps magical in nature. Such ***levitation*** is an ability held only by the living plant and not by dead or severed portions thereof. It enables the aniatha to move 3" per round in any direction (horizontal, vertical, lateral, and at any vector or angle), and is a strong force, capable of resisting normal breezes (although a *gust of wind* can often hold one at bay), and is thus unaffected by ***dispel magic*** or *reverse gravity. A push* or ***repulsion*** spell is effective in fending off a spore in most situations.

3. A gas spore's eye has 12" infravision and is sensitive to all forms of light and heat energy. Presumably, it can also detect vibratory and pressure-fluctuation disturbances, for a gas spore can detect noise and movement within 6" (although how it does this is unknown). It should be noted that a gas spore's eye cannot be blinded or dazzled by sudden or intense bursts of light, such as those produced by explosions and some creature and spell effects; these are merely absorbed by the gas spore.

4. A ***cure disease*** spell cast upon any rhizome-infested creature within 24 hours automatically destroys all the rhizomes. Note that from 20 hours of infestation until death (when the rhizomes hatch), a host body is being eaten away from within (see below).

5. Rhizome-infested creatures are ***feeble-minded*** within two rounds of initial infestation and cannot grasp objects, perform tasks, or even move without aid. This can only be cured by the application of ***cure disease*** as noted above. An affected person could stand, for example, but could not fight, defend himself, climb stairs, walk, or even push open a door unaided. If the character fell, he would lie unmoving until helped up. After 4-7 turns (3 + 1d4), the victim slips into a coma and remains therein until cured or killed by the hatching spores, regardless of external stimuli. (Application of a ***temporal stasis*** spell affects both victim and rhizomes normally, effectively freezing their activity.) After 18 hours of infestation, a victim ravaged by the spreading rhizomes must make a successful system-shock survival roll to avoid death. At 20 hours of infestation (and every hour thereafter), a host victim loses l-4 hp. These losses accumulate until death occurs, whereupon 2-8 spores erupt from the corpse. These effects occur unless curative spells are used to halt the growth of the proto-aniathas. A ***cure disease*** will destroy the rhizomes at this point, but will not cure any internal damage. By attaching themselves to such hosts, the proto-aniathas provide themselves with protein substances not found in plant life — substances which are essential to their growth and survival.

Expelled, fledgling spores hatched from a host are of small size (4′ diameter), do only 2-16 hp damage if ruptured, and are otherwise identical to a mature spore. They grow to full size at whatever rate available food and light energy permit (usually within the first one to five years of life).

The Ecology of the Rot Grub

A brief lecture not easily forgotten

by Ed Greenwood

The scholar Tantras held up a wriggling thing in a wooden clamp, taking care not to touch it with his hands. "Brethren of the Council, behold — a rot grub." His eyebrows raised at the ill-suppressed sputters of mirth audible in the meeting-chamber of the Council, but he did not look surprised at the reaction. He had counted on it.

"Not magnificent, I'll admit," the sage continued with a faint smile, calmly twirling the clamp. "Certainly not as impressive as, say, a dragon, but often—" he paused to look around the darkened lecture room at his invisible audience "—just as deadly, if not more so."

"Dispense with the cheap theatrics," came an authoritarian voice from the darkness in the back of the hall. "We are not impressed with your wit."

The clamp stopped twirling. A cold light entered Tantras's gaze as he looked toward the rear of the hall. "I see" he said easily, his smile twisting. "But such mighty mages as are assembled here may have reason to take an interest in the lowly rot grub. Those of you who are even now spending vast sums in order to learn the secret of achieving lichdom should think on the usefulness of a brainless, sightless body, tunneled into ruin by these creatures. Such a body might survive transformation — but then, it might not. And rot grubs will eat into carrion — yea, into anything organic their mouths can reach, including undead flesh as well as living."

The sudden stillness in the hall was unbroken for the space of a long minute. The writhing form in the grip of the clamp never ceased to move, straining to free itself. Tantras lowered his gaze to the mottled brown, tawny, and white grub.

"Well, say on, then," a nameless Council member grunted.

The clamp began again to rotate slowly in Tantras's hand. "My thanks, Brother," he said in an inflectionless tone, his smile deepening. "My part in the Converse tonight is admittedly not a matter of great import in the doings of states, nor yet a delicate point or discovery in dweomercraft ... but I believe many of us here would do well, every so often, to think on what is most basic in our existence. Aside from its value as an exercise in humility, such a practice yields practical information which may in time be of inestimable value. If Amurathor the Great had known what I am about to relate concerning the habits and nature of the rot grub, he might still be with us, and this Council a mere whimsy of outlawed, harried workers of magic. But he was ignorant, and he is gone, and we are neither.

"Harken, then: The rot grub, as you know, feeds on living flesh. With these—" he indicated with a wooden probe the successive rings of rasping, razor-sharp teeth at one end of his specimen "—they also burrow through offal, dung, dead flesh, and even such organic matter as loam or large plants. When burrowing, either for safety or to kill prey, a grub can cut away large gobbets of material and pass them rapidly, by muscular contortion, straight through its body, expelling them with some force." Tantras reached over and opened a metal box on the table beside him, revealing the topmost part of a large joint of mutton. He then held the clamp over the box and released the grub, ignoring the startled gasps from the front row of the audience. Twisting as it fell, the worm promptly vanished into the mutton, spraying tiny pieces of meat into the air from its burrowing hole. "As you see, it works with great speed, and it is this faculty that makes the rot grub so dangerous to man. All of you know that a rot grub will burrow to the heart of a man or any larger, living, and blooded creature in a very short time. Know now that rot grubs do this in order to breed.

"Rot grubs need flesh soaked in blood and rich in oxygen, such as that of the heart, in which to lay their eggs, for only in such an environment can the eggs be fertilized. They burrow there by instinct and lay a cluster of from six to a dozen eggs even if no other rot grub is present to fertilize the clutch. My experiments have shown that all grubs can lay eggs, and all can fertilize the eggs of others, although apparently not their own." Noting some stirring from the front rows, the sage lowered the wooden probe and gently poked at the mutton. "We are safe," he said, "so long as our friend is occupied."

The comment drew no laughter. The sage then reached into a pocket in his robes and brought out a slim, firmly-stoppered glass phial. "These are a bit small, but it is perilous to expose them to the air so near a live rot grub. In this phial are four rot grub eggs: small, green-white rubbery spheres a little less than the size of your smallest fingernail. As I've said, one rot grub lays a clutch of these, and if another rot grub comes into contact with the host creature, it will also burrow to the heart, locate the eggs by the scent and burrowing tube left by its predecessor, and exude a red, viscous fluid from its mouth as it rolls the eggs about and examines them. This fluid penetrates the

outer skin of the eggs. If the second rot grub arrives within twenty minutes of the laying of the eggs, successful fertilization occurs. Otherwise, the eggs die.

"Fertilized eggs and grubs can survive for long periods in carrion, even entombed corpses, or anywhere that affords protection from crushing, air, water, and extremes of temperature. They cease to move and function, and thus cease to require food, air, or like sustenance. The rot grub in this meat can wait here for a very long time for a live host — precisely how long, my knowledge at present does not answer, but at least two centuries, as the opening of the tomb of King Eurovan of the now-vanished realm of Nuvorene attests; a tomb-robber was slain by rot grubs then. In such a suspended state does the rot grub lie until vibration, the actual movement of their 'home' meat, or contact with warm, living flesh awakens it."

Tantras sighed and carefully closed the lid of the metal box with his probe. The automatic lock rattled and snapped shut. "And so it was with Amurathor, who like many of us believed that rot grubs shunned the taint of undead flesh. Yet it took but four of these little creatures to turn his enchanted and rotting body, reanimated by his sorcery into existence as a lich, into the skeleton which stands by the entryway to this hall — stripped of all matter but the very bone itself in a matter of an hour." He offered a side look to a particular spot in the back of the room. "Not bad work for cheap theatrics."

The sage dropped the wooden clamp onto the box lid and casually wiped his hands on his robes. "Behold, the rot grub. The most efficient of the natural scavengers, and the deadliest, for its size and repulsiveness lead all to underestimate it. Pray do not make this mistake yourselves. My last suggestion, my Brethren, is that you leave one of these—" he tapped the box with a finger "—with your most treasured magical devices and wealth in your vaults. A mundane defense, perhaps, but practical. No thief can resist opening a box. It has been a pleasure to speak with you. Good evening, and good fortune." Ω

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The Ecology of the Giant Leech

Not all assassins kill with their hands

by Anthony Gerard

Slowly, like a drugged man regaining consciousness, the sun rose over the dead water. The quavering calls of the night birds, the croaking of the frogs, and the hidden plops and gurgles were slowly replaced by the drone of the day insects and the songs of distant sparrows. The sun began to burn away the night mist, revealing the thousands of shades of green in the vast swamp of the Wet Maze.

Jaffang watched it all and hated it. It was the wrong place for a full-blooded orc. He hated the birds, the frogs, the insects, the green of the plants. Most of all, he hated Sasher.

He looked at his silent companion. Sasher squatted motionless, looking out across the water; only his yellow eyes moved. A myriad of gnats and mosquitoes swarmed around his face and arms, but he made no effort to slap them away. On either forearm were curious Y-shaped scars — probably the brand of the thieves' or assassins' guild. Sasher *liked* it here. Jaffang knew he did. It was the human half of him. Sasher liked it here, and he probably liked it that much more because he knew Jaffang hated it. Jaffang hated him that much more for it.

Sasher stood up slowly. Taking an onion from a leather belt pouch, he rubbed it vigorously over several spots on his pants and shirt before he took a bite. That was also the human in him — afraid to eat a dirty onion. What more could one expect of a half-breed?

Drawn by his companion's gaze, Sasher looked at Jaffang. Jaffang tried to smile, but it didn't work. He thought of running his spear through Sasher and the smile came, but by that time Sasher had turned away.

"Light enough. Better take off your armor," Sasher said, as if to no one in particular.

Jaffang's immediate suspicion was slowly replaced by the realization that he couldn't swim well, and that armor would just be a bother. As Jaffang removed his armor, Sasher arranged a wooden box on a shield-sized raft, then waded out waist-deep in the swamp's green water, probing with the butt of his spear as he went. "You bring the box," he said.

Jaffang started to curse but caught himself. With Sasher in front, the half-breed would be the first to meet any possible danger. Jaffang contented himself by watching the place between Sasher's shoulder blades — the place where one day an orcish spear would rest.

For now, Sasher was necessary. Soon, Jaffang would learn the secret of making blade venom from the leech's spit, the venom which could make a man bleed to death from a single cut. Then, by One Eye's Spear, they'd all have reason to fear Jaffang. And he would kill Sasher first — of that he was certain.

The water was warm, almost like fresh blood. Jaffang's bare feet sank ankle deep into the receptive ooze on the bottom. He pulled the raft along the trail Sasher created as he pushed through the water plants. Suddenly, Jaffang tripped on an underwater snag, fell headlong, and came up sputtering. Sasher looked back and laughed out loud.

Laugh now, Jaffang thought. He decided to kill Sasher slowly. But first he needed to learn about the leeches and the blade venom.

"Where do we find these leeches?" Jaffang asked, to cover his rage more than to get a response.

Sasher maintained his distant gaze. "We don't," he replied. "They find us."

Jaffang looked suspiciously at the water, belly-deep on him. "Ragshaf says they're bigger than a man." It was more of a question than a statement.

"Ragshaf's a fool. Besides, he's only seen one." Sasher seemed more talkative than usual. So much the better.

"When?"

"Not long after I got into the guild." Sasher rarely talked about anything at all, much less about guild activities. "Me, Ragshaf, and a couple of other boys from the canting crew were supposed to pop a smuggler coming down river at night." Sasher smiled as he stared into the distance. "Ol' Jandamon was along to guide us. We were in a boat on the river, not

knowin' exactly when he'd come by, so we decided to draw lots for a watcher while the others slept.

"Anyway, after a while Ragshaf — it was his watch — got spooked over something and woke us, all but Jandamon. We went to wake him, but he's as limp as a worm. When we rolled him over, there was a leech as big as your leg and just as thick, hanging on his neck. It must have crawled over the side. Killed him while he slept, and he never so much as squeaked. And him such a warrior and all. We laughed so hard our prize heard us, and we lost him. Ragshaf killed the leech with the boat gaff, which was a real waste."

"I thought the leeches breathed water."

"They don't have to. They live just fine as long as they're wet, so they come out at night or in a rain. Good climbers, too. Watch for some on the tree trunks — it's still early enough yet."

Sasher stopped. From a fallen tree, a sinuous, mottled gray-brown form lazily sculled across the stagnant water toward them.

"A leech! A leech!" Jaffang cried as he readied his spear. Now that they had found their quarry, he was not sure what to do next.

"It's a marsh adder," Sasher said, leaving the word "fool" unspoken. He reached for an arm-long cane tube slung across his back. As the adder swam slowly past, he put the tube to his lips and puffed his cheeks. After what seemed to be the longest seconds Jaffang could remember, the snake convulsed violently and disappeared underwater.

"A leech wiggles up and down when he swims, not side to side like a snake,, Sasher murmured, putting the blowpipe away. "Leeches swim fast, too."

Jaffang stared. at the water where the adder had vanished. "Can one swim down a man?"

"Probably could, but they don't. Leeches sit and wait for something to pass by. They only swim to get away from something."

"What would a giant leech need to get away from?"

"Big snapper turtles, garfish, lots of things. Kobolds spit 'em on a stick and roast them like a rack of lamb — when the runts can catch 'em, and if the leeches don't eat the kobolds first."

"How many people wade through here for leeches to eat? They must have a long time between feeds."

Sasher smiled crookedly. "You think they eat nothing but people and orcs? I've never seen a swamp troll without a couple on him — 'course, trolls don't care. A leech'll eat other things than just blood, too — frogs, mud dragon eggs, eels, and the like. Mama leech feeds her brood on small frogs. They may suckle on her, too; I'm not real sure. After a good meal, they just find a hiding place and lie low for a time."

Jaffang sneered. "Mama leech? You expect me to believe that a big worm takes care of its babies?"

Sasher spat. "Better mother than my own — they ride their babies on their bellies, like little piglets on a sow."

Sasher was making fun of him now. Big mother worms riding their babies around! Damn him for a half-human anyway! Soon enough, he'd wish he'd been respectful.

Jaffang asked no more questions, and Sasher lapsed into his usual silence.

The sun was straight overhead as Jaffang jerked the raft across yet another snag. The full sunlight hurt his eyes, and his jerkin and pants were heavy with mud and water. He had begun to fall further and further behind Sasher. Often, he lost sight of the half-breed altogether and was left with only the trail through the water weeds to follow. He would eventually come upon Sasher sitting on a fallen log or leaned against a tree. Sasher would immediately lead out again, without time for a rest, but always with an amused smile. *By the Cave Mother's Claws*, Jaffang thought, *You'll eat that smile and choke on it.* He was going to love killing Sasher.

Sasher was ahead of him again and out of sight. Jaffang began feeling the heavy press of exhaustion. This was worse than the forced march on the Dunlands last year. Jaffang shoved the raft through a thick mat of cattails. Following through, he found Sasher sitting cross-legged on the bank, eating an onion. Why was this place so familiar . . . no!

It was the place from which they'd started! Sasher had played him for a fool! Jaffang had hauled the damned raft through a swamp all day for no reason, and Sasher was smiling about it!

He'd kill Sasher *now* — to the Hells with the blade venom! Tired as he was, Jaffang knew he could still handle any half-human dog.

Dropping the raft rope, Jaffang advanced purposely toward the bank, clutching his spear. Then it hit him — something was wrong. He hefted his spear to throw, but he fumbled it in clumsy fingers. The spear fell and splashed into the green water. Jaffang swayed but managed to stagger forward again, pulling his dagger free with a nerveless hand. Something. . . something was very . . . very . . .

Sasher watched Jaffang come toward him. The fool meant to kill him. The fact that he was still walking was a credit to his race's endurance; he might even have to be finished by a dart in the throat. Perhaps it would be wise to . . .

Jaffang dropped his dagger. As Sasher relaxed and watched, the life drained from the orc's eyes like liquid from a slashed wineskin. The orc stumbled ashore and fell face forward onto the grassy bank.

Sasher finished his onion. Tossing the core aside, he waded out and retrieved the raft. Taking a large heavy canvas sack out of the box, Sasher dumped its contents of rocks. Returning to Jaffang's body, Sasher drew a dagger and slit the orc's mud-stained jerkin up the back.

"Oh, ho, now!" he murmured. "Don't you boys look fat and happy!"

Attached to the middle of Jaffang's back were two glistening leeches, each mottled red and green, and each a forearm in length. Sasher found a third of similar size on Jaffang's calf.

Sasher removed a small pouch from around his neck and took out a pinch of salt. Gently, he sprinkled the salt over one of the leeches. The passive leech released its hold and began a series of wild undulations. Sasher splashed a handful of water over the leech and quickly worked the parasite into the bag.

Where the leech had been attached, a neat Y-shaped cut began to well up with thin, watery blood. Sasher repeated the operation for the other two leeches.

Wasting no time, Sasher removed a smaller leech from a pouch on his belt and put it in the bag with the others. Each time he was well ahead of Jaffang, Sasher had searched himself carefully for leeches. The onion had worked well; only one had dared get near him.

Sasher turned to go but stopped short. Out from a tangle of roots at the water's edge, a leech worked its way up the bank. The leech's head waved back and forth as it followed the thin stream of blood which ran from Jaffang's body. Sasher gently placed the opening of the bag in the leech's path, and the leech obligingly crawled inside.

Five leeches. It had been a good day's work, even if he did have to spend it making conversation with an orc.

Notes

1. Leeches (both the small variety of our world and the giant variety of AD&D® game worlds) are segmented worms. The posterior and anterior segments of leeches are modified into suction disks. The posterior disk is larger and is used only to hold the leech in place against rocks and the like. The smaller anterior disk contains the leech's mouth, which is equipped with three jaws of teeth which make a clean, Y-shaped incision.

A leech's saliva contains an anesthetic; because of this, a leech bite is painless and almost always goes unnoticed. This viscous saliva acts immediately upon contact with the victim's skin, and is only removed by alcohol, ether, or similar liquids. Additionally, leech saliva contains an anticoagulant (hirudin) and a substance which enlarges the blood vessels in the area of the bite (a vasodilator, in medical terms) for increased blood flow. Some leech saliva even contains a substance which dissolves pre-existing blood clots.

Due to these anticoagulants, blood continues to flow from a leech bite much longer than from a normal wound. Characters bitten by a leech lose blood at the rate of 1-4 hp per melee round for l-12 rounds after the leech is removed (or until the wound is bound). Clerical healing

spells negate this excessive blood loss, as may other actions at the DM's discretion. As an example, some swamp-dwelling races commonly use spider webs to help clot leech bites.

In addition to anticoagulants and vasodilators, a leech's saliva contains antibiotics, so leech bites rarely become infected. It is suggested that the Monster Manual section dealing with increased chance of disease from leech bites be disregarded, and that leech bites should be treated as any other wound for chances of infection.

2. Not all leech species are blood-sucking parasites. Many are predacious species which feed on other animals, and many parasitic species eat other animals on occasion. Some leech species also eat carrion.

Leeches typically rest attached to plants and other underwater objects, waiting for prey to pass by. Extremely sensitive to vibrations, leeches become restless and attempt to locate the source of the vibrations by stretching and waving their anterior disk through the water.

A leech may thrive for months on a single meal. Once sated, a leech typically finds a sheltered place and stays relatively inactive for a time. A well-fed leech cannot be induced to feed again for weeks.

It has long been known that blood in a leech's digestive tract does not coagulate. This knowledge may be exploited by some evil forces in the AD&D® game world to keep blood used in ceremonial liquids for a longer duration.

3. A leech's eyes typically consist of groups of light receptive cells (ocelli) which register light intensity but cannot see images. Leeches often react when light conditions change, such as when a shadow is cast by a passing boat, fish, or a wading person.

Receptor cells on the leech's skin are sensitive to slight amounts of certain chemicals. This keen sense of "smell" allows leeches to home in on substances or organisms attractive to the leech or to avoid those which may be harmful.

Blood-sucking species may be attracted to bloody areas in the water. In AD&D® game terms, the chance for encountering giant leeches should be doubled for wounded characters.

4. Leeches have two main modes of locomotion. The most common is an "inchworm" movement, by which the leech stretches forward and attaches its anterior disk, then moves the posterior disk forward and attaches it in turn. This method is slow (3"/round) but very efficient. A leech can climb any vertical or overhanging surface in this manner, although it generally avoids those that are potentially harmful (such as one covered with thorns or salt). Additionally, a leech may swim very rapidly (12"/round) by employing vertical undulations, but it will not attack prey in this manner.

Leeches do not bite in self-defense. If attacked while unattached, a leech tries to escape as soon as it is wounded. An escaping leech swims away or attempts to crawl into a protective tangle. Since leeches are invertebrates, a relatively large leech can crawl through a very small space.

5. While attached to prey, leeches are very unresponsive to outside stimuli. Salt, ashes, or other dehydrating substances cause them to release their hold quickly, as will an open flame. An attached leech which is slain continues to draw blood at the normal rate for an additional 1-4 rounds.

6. Leeches are hermaphroditic, but they cannot fertilize their own eggs. Eggs may be laid in protective cocoons attached to underwater rocks or logs, or buried in the bottom ooze. Some species of leech carry their eggs in membranous sacs on their underside. In such cases, the young live for a time attached to the parent's ventral surface, although they gain no nourishment from the parent in this manner.

7. Leeches are very sensitive to traces of metals in the water. Copper in their water always proves fatal to captive leeches. Additionally, captive leeches must be provided with a rock or other rough surface to rub against, in order to slough off old skin. Ω

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The Ecology of the Gelatinous Cube

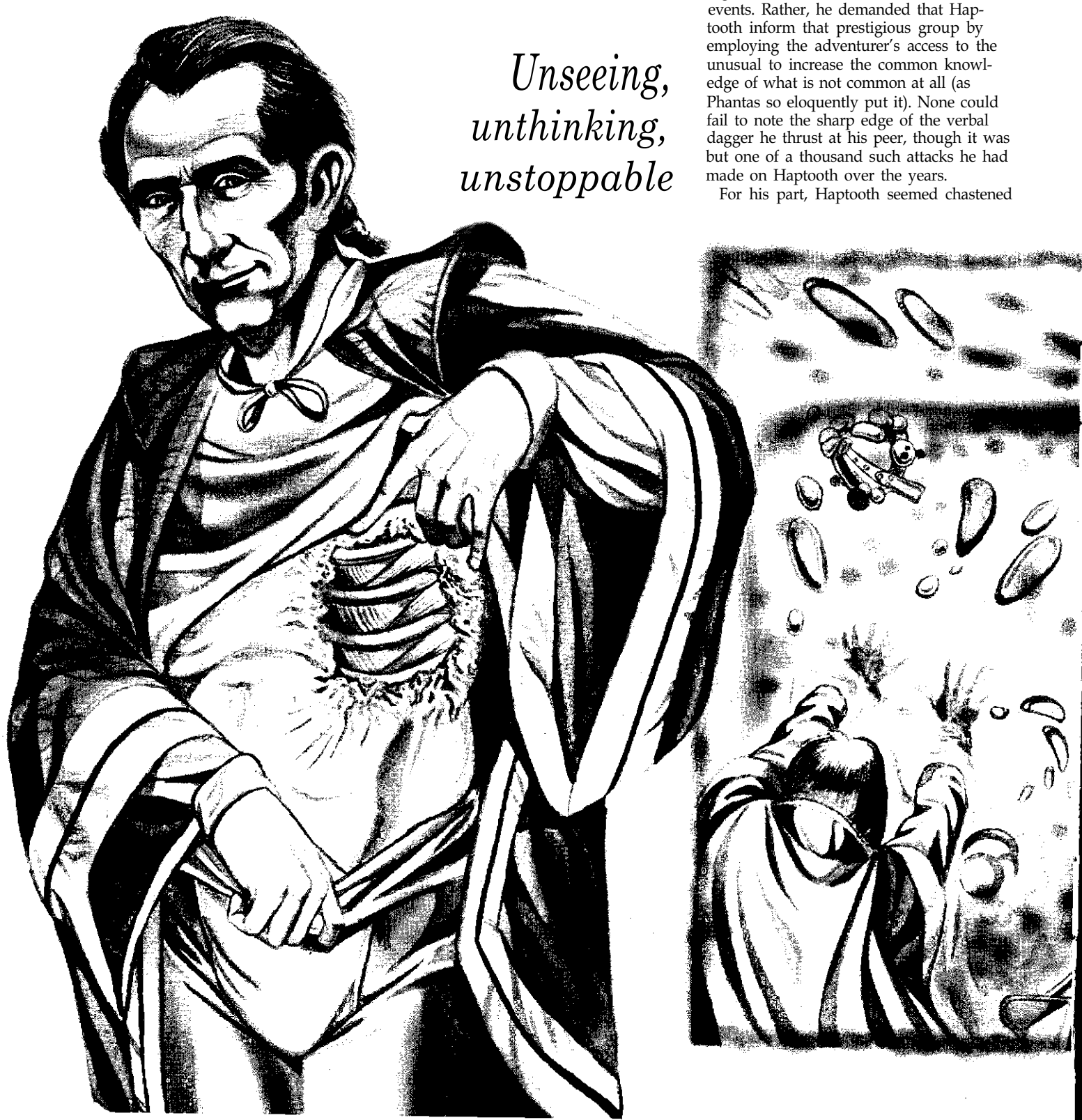
Unseeing, unthinking, unstoppable

by Ed Greenwood

The adventurer Haptooth had spent many years exploring the vast, labyrinthine, subterranean ways of Undermountain, Waterdeep. Many and strange were the tales he shared over sour brintmash wine at The Sign of the Staff or before the Council of Mages upon the Feast of the Moon, at winter's onset.

At the last Feast, Phantas, a member of that Council, pointedly challenged Haptooth to do more than entertain by speaking of curious observations and dramatic events. Rather, he demanded that Haptooth inform that prestigious group by employing the adventurer's access to the unusual to increase the common knowledge of what is not common at all (as Phantas so eloquently put it). None could fail to note the sharp edge of the verbal dagger he thrust at his peer, though it was but one of a thousand such attacks he had made on Haptooth over the years.

For his part, Haptooth seemed chastened



by the words of his rival and, indeed, came to the next yearly Feast with words of note, for he spoke of inquiries into the nature of that curious creature, the athcoid — more commonly known as the gelatinous cube.

Controversy over the athcoid has long raged among the wise — quite heatedly so in the corridors of the Hall of Beast-Tamers and in the offices of the Imperial Zoo of Amn, the keepers of which have managed to keep a cube alive in captivity for some 12 winters. Over and over, the questions are asked: How intelligent are the cubes? How amorphous are their forms? Of what is their digestive fluid composed, and can it be used as a weapon or in alchemy (or, for that matter, in medicine or in the handling of beasts)? How do athcoids mate —indeed, *do* athcoids mate? Haptooth provided all at the Council of Mages with answers.

"Even now," he said, "in the lightless ways beneath us, these great creatures glide noiselessly along, devoid of malicious intent — indeed, devoid of an consciousness at all — but fully a menace to all who encounter them. Even children know that these nearly transparent, gelatinous monsters cannot digest metal or stone, but feed on plants and beasts of all sorts by paralyzing those encountered, engulfing them, and absorbing nutrients from such prey by means of corrosive digestive fluids.

"Athcoids have no thoughts as we know them, but rather respond automatically — and identically, in all cases — to certain stimuli. They cease to advance when they encounter a cold surface or object, then probe forward to seek a way past or around it. Athcoids are attracted to vibrations or warmth, but seem devoid of hearing. When flowing over or around objects, they seem quite fluid and mutable, but return always to a rectangular or rhomboidal form when their surroundings permit.

"An athcoid does not appear to communicate with any creature, nor can it be controlled, save by use of the stimuli I have already mentioned. When two athcoids meet — and this I saw happen — they merge to become one, of greater size and of an apparently stable nature. This monstrous combination has twice the innate hardiness of either of its component creatures, though it eventually divides into two normal athcoids, each exactly like the original component creatures, which go their separate ways.

"More I can tell, gained from the darkest researches. Sadly, athcoids are ignorant of sex." Mutterings and chuckles from the Council followed the comment. "Rather, they reproduce by growing to sufficient size, then split into two slightly smaller creatures. These creatures then grow to a stage which passes for adulthood within a short time.

"As you all must know, athcoids anesthetize prey by means of a gummy secretion which is absorbed into the bloodstream of the prey through its skin. An oral antidote is now available to counteract this effect." Haptooth held up a metal flask, then returned it to its place beside another such flask on the lectern before him. "This antidote is of my own devise. It's expensive, but then so are the consequences if you lack it."

Haptooth paused, appearing to reflect upon some matter. "As to their digestive fluids — these are produced and held in movable, elastic cavities or bubbles within an athcoid's body. When prey is engulfed by a cube, one or more of these mobile bubbles are shifted into contact with the prey. Such fluid has no effect on metal of any sort, and, as we have all heard, metal objects are held for a time within the creature, then expelled through its skin; but the fluid has devastating effects on flesh and cellulose."

So saying, Haptooth undid his sash and pulled his robe open. The crowd mumbled grunts and oaths of amazement. Haptooths ribs were laid bare in an ivory lattice on one flank. All about this gaping hole, his flesh was gnarled and twisted like half-melted wax.

"I recently fought my way through a cube, when trapped in a dead-end passage, and this was the result," he said simply. He continued to hold his robe open, turning slowly to allow all in the Hall to see his injury. Then, dropping his arms, he went back to his lectern and took up the two flasks, pocketing the antidote. As he undid the cap on the other, he slowly walked toward the audience, in the direction of Phantas. "Dearly, I paid for my labors, but they were well rewarded. I captured a sample of the digestive fluid," he said in a loud voice, whereupon he drenched the astonished councillor with its contents. "Now, the eminent alchemist Phantas can in his turn increase the common knowledge of what is not common at all."

He left then, *teleporting* with a last fiendish grin, as Phantas's scream echoed loudly through the hall.

Notes

1. Gelatinous cubes may flow through openings as small as 1′ across. They sense all living, moving beings within 120′ from the vibrations and heat given off by such creatures, and actively pursue such prey.

2. Being so totally mindless, a gelatinous cube should be immune to all will-force and mind-affecting magical powers — particularly enchantment/charm spells and mind-reading talents. Charm *monster* thus has no effect upon them.

3. When two cubes meet and merge, the resulting "double cube" attacks as an 8-HD monster with a total number of hit points equal to the total of the two merged cubes. This combination creature retains a size of 10′ x 10′ x 20′, the longest axis being pointed in its direction of travel like a thick-bodied (but square) worm. Otherwise, it is like a normal cube in all respects. Division occurs either immediately upon contact with a third cube or after a period of 2-8 days. Normal-sized cubes divide after a period of six years. Each of the two resulting cubes has 3 HD, half the number of hit points the "parent" cube originally had, and a size of slightly under 8′ x 8′ x 8′. These "little" cubes grow to maturity in three months. Technitally speaking, the gelatinous cube is an immortal organism, since (unless destroyed by adventurers, starvation, or disaster) a cube never dies.

4. Cubes may move about underwater with ease, though the contact poison which paralyzes opponents is much diluted. Saving throws against this effect are made at +6 in this environment.

5. If Haptooth's antidote against a cube's *paralysis* is made available, it removes the *paralysis* within 1-4 rounds after being swallowed (an automatic reflex not stopped by the paralysis). However, the potion has no effect on any other form of *paralysis*, such as that from ghouls or carrion crawlers. The antidote is not magical in nature. Ω

The Ecology

One of a broad and

by Nigel D. Findley

"And," said Baylock with great relish, "thus ends the tale of Nex the Archer. Somehow, he escaped the will-o'-wisps with his life; how, we'll never know — at least, not from him." The guide nodded sagely. "Aye, he escaped with his life. But his mind is another story. Nex will never speak again, I hear." He glanced at his employer — Araman, that was his name — huddled nervously on the other side of the fire. "It happened near here, they say," Baylock continued innocently, with an airy gesture at the mangroves pressing close around them. Araman looked about him, licking his lips nervously. Baylock grinned to himself.

Then he decided to let the other man off the hook. Araman wasn't such a bad sort, not like many of the rich dimwits Baylock had wet-nursed through the marshes in the past. Certainly, he was a soft city dweller, not tempered to hardship like Baylock and his lads. But he'd come to Baylock with a fair price — and without the rankling disdain that most city dwellers had for the mist-eaters who lived and worked along the marshes. Araman also kept up and pulled his weight — that, moreso than most.

"But no worries," Baylock finished. "That was five years ago — or more — and nobody's seen a will-o'-wisp around here since. Don't concern yourself with it, sir,"

Across the fire, Araman glanced up with surprise at the guide's "sir," Since they'd struck the deal for guided passage through the marsh, Baylock had addressed him as nothing but "you." What had mellowed the grizzled mist-eater, Araman couldn't guess. But he wasn't going to question it.

Still, Araman was uncomfortable. He looked again at the gnarled mangroves and saw that they seemed to move in the flickering firelight. Baylock's three "boys" — actually men of Araman's age — lay wrapped in their sleeping rolls, well away from the fire. Their backs were turned to the warmth as if to scorn the city man's weak need for a fire. But Baylock himself sat near the blaze. Was he trying to be companionly? Whatever the reason, if the guide was suddenly willing to talk, Araman wanted to take advantage of the chance.

of the Greenhag

evil family of hags

"So," Araman said, his voice weaker than he liked. "No will-o'-wisps. Then what does live around here? The most dangerous creature?"

Baylock smiled. "Apart from the vultures and the giant lizards and the occasional mist dragon, you mean?" He thought for a moment, and his smile faded. "Well," he went on slowly, "there are tales of a shellycoat."

Araman glanced at the three backs turned to the fire. Had they stiffened slightly? "What's a shellycoat?" the city dweller asked. He wasn't sure that he should have inquired.

Baylock looked for another stick to add to the fire. "Maybe you know it as a greenhag."

No doubt about it this time. Baylock's men were listening. One stirred briefly as if turning in his sleep, but he merely positioned himself to hear the discussion better. Araman. leaned forward, fascinated but nervous. Anything that could scare these mist-eaters was worth knowing of. "Tell me about it."

Baylock shrugged and waved a hand. "Not much to tell," he said. "The shellycoat — the greenhag — well, it's like the annis, but even more dangerous."

"It's like the . . . ?"

Baylock sighed. "The annis," he repeated patiently. "A blue giantess. As vicious and cruel a creature as you'd ever be sorry enough to meet. You find them in wilderness mountains, swamps, forests — any climate but the warmest. Just about anywhere well away from civilization. Same with the greenhag. Both are relatives of the night hag." He leaned forward. "You do know of the night hag?"

"Of course. But how — how are they related?"

"Simple. What do you get when you cross a night hag with a human or a demi-human, eh? You get a greenhag."[1] Baylock chuckled. "You think that every time a night hag goes out hunting, it's only to drag some poor soul off to Hades? Oh, no; sometimes it's not a man's *life* she wants. Enough to make your blood run cold, it is."

Baylock stopped suddenly and cocked his head, listening. "Hear that?" he asked quietly.

Araman strained his ears. Nothing: just the constant background murmur of the swamp insects. Suddenly, a chilling howl broke above the subtle murmur. "What was that?" Araman gasped. Baylock's men got to their feet in remarkable time, short swords and daggers free in their hands. They seemed quite awake.

"A wolf, I think." Baylock called some instructions, and his three men sheathed blades, unlimbered short bows, and melted into the darkness out of the firelight. "Don't worry," he said, turning back to Araman. "My boys'll take care of it, whatever it is. If they can't stab it, shaft it, or slice it, they'll salute it. Now, where were we?"

"The greenhag," Araman reminded him. "And the shellycoat, if there's any difference."

Baylock shook his head. "No, no difference. 'Shellycoat' is just what we call her when she lives in a swamp or river. That's when she's most dangerous, to my mind. Sometimes she'll lie in wait underwater to rend fishermen — aye, and mist-eaters, too — as they pass by."[2]

Araman shivered. "You say 'she.' Are there no male greenhags?"

"Never," Baylock said flatly. "Some say it's because the female hag's blood is dominant; some say it's because the night hag mother eats the male babes at birth. Whichever. No male greenhags." A thin smile wrinkled his face. "Though that's not to say the greenhag doesn't get a yen for male companionship, if you take my meaning. She just has to look for it outside her own species, like her mother, though the greenhag prefers the big boys like ogres and giants. And that's where you get the annis.[3] Now, the annis—"

Both men stiffened as a bowstring sang in the darkness. Another twang was followed by a hoarse call of "Over here!" Through the clatter of underbrush, a high-pitched cry assaulted the evening air. The cry ended abruptly in silence.

Baylock started to get to his feet, then slowly sat down again and forced a smile. "Whatever that is, my boys are giving it what for." He nervously eyed the treeline. "Anyway, the annis follows her mother's attitude towards ogres and giants. She deals with them for the same things: information, provender, and companionship. On occasion, you even find an annis living with an ogre or giant tribe as the wife of the tribal chieftain." Baylock smiled briefly. "If that isn't a case of the power behind the throne, I don't know what is."[4]

The sound of combat again stirred the night. A commotion in the undergrowth was followed quickly by another twanging bowstring — then by a cry hoarse with agony: "Help me, Baylock!"

The guide was on his feet in a moment, his blade drawn. "Stay put," he said grimly. "I'll be back." Rushing off into the brush, Baylock disappeared into the blackness.

Araman wrapped his cloak closer around him. He glanced down at his hands; they shook as though with the palsy. He clenched them, and the shaking stopped. The night grew quiet and long.

Araman didn't see the figure until she had stepped into the clearing, squinting her orange eyes against the light of the fire. Her rags were tattered, and dark blood — not hers — fell from her black claws and splotched her green skin. Withered lips drew back from needle-pointed fangs in a mockery of a smile. When she spoke, it was in the same pain-roughened voice Araman had just heard, but black with irony. "Help me, Araman!"

Araman knew it would do no good to scream.

But he screamed anyway.

Notes

1. After mating with a human or demi-human male, a pregnant night hag remains in Hades throughout the 13-month gestation period. Following this time, she returns to the Prime Material Plane to give birth. From the moment of delivery, the newborn greenhag is able to fend for herself (which is just as well, since the night hag mother abandons the infant immediately). The greenhag, which is always female, is similar in appearance to a human infant; only her long black fingernails and the greenish tinge of her skin give away her true nature.

At birth, the greenhag has only 2 HD, and does limited damage (1-2/1-2; no strength bonus). She maintains her characteristic armor class of -2, however. The greenhag originally has no spell-like powers or mimicry ability, and so depends on cunning and stealth to catch her food — generally, anything that moves, with humans and demi-humans preferred. The greenhag grows rapidly, reaching her full size, strength, and powers at the age of 18 months.

The greenhag's alignment is always that of the mother: neutral evil. Her intelligence, which ranges from low to very, is equal to the father's intelligence score minus 1d6 (as long as this figure does not put it out of the allowable range: 5-12). The language of the night hag, which is wrongly reputed to be a dialect of annis, is actually a degenerate form of the tongue spoken by night hags. The greenhag's knowledge of her own language is innate; other languages (and sounds she can mimic) must be learned.

The greenhag's spell-like abilities and her inhuman strength are also degenerate gifts of the monster's mother. Dilution with human or demi-human blood has weakened the night hag's extraplanar powers, making some abilities mere shadows of the original powers *(invisibility* instead of *etherealness, change self* instead of *polymorph self, weakness* instead of *enfeeblement).* Some of these powers are removed altogether (e.g., the night hag's ability to *gate* in demons or devils and her resistance to nonmagical weapons). As if in recompense for this, some new powers, which are more in tune with the Prime Material Plane, have been given to the greenhag (e.g., ***pass without trace,*** speak ***with monsters,*** etc.). A greenhag's lifespan is usually around 500 years (less than her mother's 1,000-year span because of the diluting effect of human or demi-human blood).

2. A greenhag often makes her lair in an underwater cave, using her ***water breathing*** ability (which lasts for 27 turns, or 4½ hours) to dwell therein. If no suitable body of water is available, the lair is usually concealed (for example, screened by overhanging plants or shielded from view by a large boulder). Being a cowardly creature at heart, a greenhag will go to great lengths to prevent her lair from being found, often going so far as to enter and leave it only while *invisible.*

This innate cowardice also dictates the greenhag's favored methods of hunting: lying in wait while *invisible* or otherwise concealed, or using her mimicry — which is often coupled with her *change self* ability — to lure prey into an indefensible position (for example, into quicksand) or away from comrades. Although physically very powerful, the greenhag is a bully who often shuns a fair fight. If confronted by strong, determined opposition, she will flee. Conversely, if her prey is much weaker than she, a greenhag will cruelly "play" with it (in the same manner that a cat plays with a bird or mouse) before killing and eating it.

3. Although basically solitary creatures, greenhags sometimes deal with ogres and hill giants (usually those of lower intelligence who are easily dominated), trading baubles looted from their victims for information, food, and protection as necessary. Quite frequently, greenhags also mate with smaller members of ogre or hill-giant tribes. Any male ogre or giant may father the greenhag's child.

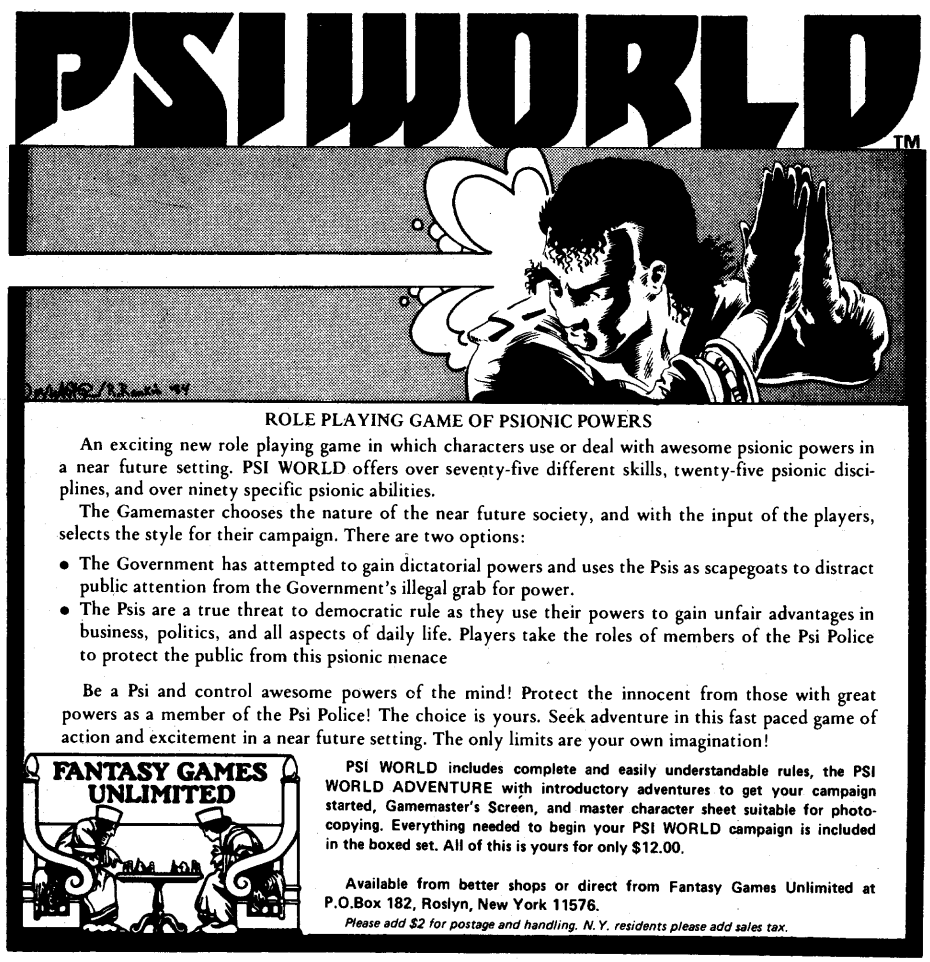
After a seven-month gestation period, the greenhag gives birth to an annis. Like the greenhag, the newborn annis (which is always female) is similar in appearance to a large human infant, again except for skin color. At birth, the annis has 1 HD and can attack by bite only, doing 1d4 hp damage (no strength bonus). Her armor class from birth is 0. Like the greenhag, the annis infant has no spell-like powers, but can sometimes depend on her ogrish or giantish father to feed her for a brief while. The greenhag provides nothing for the baby annis, which the mother abandons at birth. The annis grows even more rapidly than the greenhag, reaching full maturity at the age of 12 months.

As the night hag's characteristics are diluted by breeding with a human or demi-human, so are the greenhag's characteristics weakened by the addition of ogrish or giantish blood. The annis's innate knowledge of language is even more imperfect, so her tongue becomes a further degeneration of the original night hag speech. The annis's resistance to punishment is decreased, and more of the night hag's powers have vanished. The annis's lifespan, too, is lessened, dropping to approximately double the lifespan of her father's race. Even the annis's alignment is changed from neutral evil to a more selfish, chaotic bent.

Apart from size, the only boon the annis receives from her father is increased strength. The annis's enhanced range of intelligence (to a maximum of exceptional) is a special case, resulting more from the recessive inheritance of night hag intelligence; the higher range of intelligence has skipped a generation. This throwback situation also explains the annis's return to the night hag's purity of complexion.

4. The annis shares her mother's bullying nature — although she is not as much of a coward — and will often be found amongst a tribe of non-humans if she can dominate them (usually by dominating the leader). An ogre or giant clan that includes an annis is generally more cunning and cruel in nature than the norm.

An annis will mate with an ogre or hill giant, if one can be found. Such a mating rarely (10%) results in live offspring. Although not strictly a mule, the annis is not a very fertile strain. When the annis does produce offspring, the infant is always the same race as the father, and always female. The only legacies of the mother are increased resilience (i.e., the offspring always has the maximum hit points for the species in question) and a bluish tinge to her complexion. All other characteristics are derived from the father. Unlike the night hag and greenhag, the annis usually succors the infant as would a female of the father's species. Ω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The Ecology

of the Shade

Outcasts in a shadowy world

by Dan Salas

The sleeping chamber was filled with shadows and formless black shapes. On the bed slept Carissa, the Lady of Graham Manor. Her young face was faintly lit by starlight from the single bedroom window. Until midnight, she slept undisturbed, exhausted from the day's events.

Suddenly she sat up, her wide eyes peering into the darkness. The change from dreams to shadowed reality was startling. Lady Carissa knew that she was a light sleeper, but only some nearby disturbance could awaken her so violently. The silence and blackness of the chamber only increased her nervousness. With damp hands, she reached over to her bedside table and spoke the words of a simple cantrip to light a candle. The small yellow flame did not completely drive away the darkness, but it was better than nothing. A wizardess had been able to teach her that much.

Carissa looked around as her eyes adjusted to the pale light. She saw the familiar furnishings, thick carpets, purple dragon sculptures, bright tapestries, and silk bedsheets. The heavy stones of the walls seemed to reassure her that the fortress was still strong. Then her gaze found the intruder, and she froze.

A man sat motionless in a chair across the room, dressed in gray and black. His face was partially covered by a black cloth wrapped around his jaw, and his eyes were hidden in the shadows of a black hood. He seemed more like a phantom than a man. Though his posture was not threatening, Carissa stared at him with a paralyzing fear. If she shouted for help, would anyone arrive in time? Was he an assassin?

The intruder held up one gloved hand. "Please don't call the guards," he said softly. "I've come to help you, not harm you."

Carissa's brow wrinkled. She thought that the voice sounded familiar, but she did not recognize the stranger. Being the lady of a large and powerful estate, she was even now recovering her wits and sense of command. She was on her own. "Who are you?" she whispered fiercely.

For a moment, the intruder did not answer. During this silence, Carissa noticed the dagger strapped to his thigh, the long sword at his side, and the studded leather vest under his dark cloak. Seeing that he was a warrior and not a night-demon, she gave him a steadier look.

"Tonight, I'm an advisor," he finally said. "I'm here to tell you about the man who wounded your beloved, Lord Graham."

Carissa perceived bitterness in the intruder's voice as he spoke the name of her husband. She did not understand his indignity, so she ignored it, trying to think clearly. "How do you know about my lords wound?"

"Right now, he lays in the chapel with your clerics. He'll live, this time. But you'll

need to know more about his attacker if you're to keep your husband in this world."

Carissa was taken aback. Maybe he was a spy. "You seem to know much."

"Then hear my words. Lord Graham's attacker is not a demon, nor is he a normal assassin. Your enemy is a shade."

A childhood tale drifted up from memory. "A shade?"

"Yes. Once a man, but now a creature of darkness. A shade is a person who has traded his soul to gain a permanent connection to the Plane of Shadow. There, the Positive and Negative Material Planes meet in the shadow of the Prime Material Plane. Do you understand what I mean?"

Carissa nodded, fascinated. She was a scholar as well as a noble, and her interest in the metasciences was drawn out by the mysterious intruder.

"A shade receives effects from the Positive and Negative Planes:' he continued. "From the Positive, he receives immunity from aging and disease, as well as powers of healing. To the Negative Plane, he loses his soul. His appearance becomes dark as night, and his personality becomes even darker."[1]

"Who would do this to himself?"

The stranger chuckled sarcastically, sadly. "Anyone who finds no joy in daylight and who cares nothing for the company of others. Anyone who would gladly trade his soul for the powers of the night."

The stranger slipped into brooding silence. Feeling awkward but less afraid, Carissa asked, "How is it done?"

"There are some clerics who will make the transformation for a price — usually 3,000 gold pieces.[2] I don't know the exact spells that are used, but I know that the person must be brought to the Plane of Shadow, where the cleric . . . slays him and makes the transformation.[3] The person is then a shade. He can never again be returned from the dead because he has no soul, no spirit. He cannot increase his skills.[4] He-cannot have children."

"There must not be many such people in the world."

Table 1
Shade Character Class

Die roll	Character class
1	Cavalier
2-7	Fighter
8-10	Magic-user
11-12	Illusionist
13-17	Thief
18-20	Assassin

Table 2
Shade Alignment

Die roll	Alignment
1-2	Lawful neutral
3	True neutral
4-5	Chaotic neutral
6-7	Lawful evil
8-9	Neutral evil
10	Chaotic evil

Note: Reroll result if it is inconsistent with the assassin character class.

"No, not many. The sacrifices are too great for most people to accept. But there are some . . ." [5] The stranger's mind seemed to wander as he spoke. Carissa listened attentively, unsure of the truth of his story, and increasingly doubtful of his sanity. "Not all shades are evil in nature, but none of them are actually good. The ones who changed from good alignment sometimes seek revenge against those who caused their misery. Lawful shades usually continue their war against chaos. Evil shades usually continue their war against everyone."

As the man's voice drifted off, Carissa decided to change the course of the conversation. "You were talking about my husbands attacker. . . "

"Yes, of course." The stranger seemed to regather his thoughts, and he spoke with new energy. "The attacker's name is Varian. This shade came to me four days ago and asked that I help him kill Lord Graham. He seeks vengeance for some personal reason. I refused his offer."

"How do we fight him?"

"Light is your best weapon. In bright light, a shade becomes weak, and is more vulnerable to magical attacks. Have your clerics cast continual *light* spells on lanterns. Leave no passage unlit that leads to your lord. In the shadows, a shade can transport himself to the Plane of Shadow, so you must keep Varian in bright light or in complete darkness. As a last resort, use a *holy word* to force him to return to the Plane of Shadow.

"Varian himself remains on the Prime Material Plane during daylight. He sleeps in the ruins of Thurid Castle. There you can trap him and kill him."

Carissa nodded. "If your words are true, you'll be richly rewarded."

The man snorted in disgust. "I don't want your gold."

"Then why have you helped us?"

The stranger sat in silence, his vision fixed upon her. Then he stood and walked slowly toward her. Carissa shrank back from him, preparing to call for the guards, but the intruder made no move for his weapons. Instead, he sat on the edge of the bed. Still, Carissa could not see his eyes.

"I've helped Lord Graham because I know that his death would ruin you. I don't want any harm to come to you, Carissa. I still love you, even more than I did ten years ago."

Suddenly she recognized his voice, recognized the figure under the black clothes, recognized his manner of moving and speaking. Her heart jumped and she cried out, "Dimitri!"

The man leaned toward her and extended a hand. With wild joy she moved closer to him, but then he grasped the candle flame and crushed it. Shadows filled the room again.

Her heart racing, Carissa waved a hand in front of her. Dimitri was not within reach. As she frantically relit the candle with her last cantrip, she thought of Dimitri: a lost lover from her past, an honorable man whom she had loved deeply before her father had wed her to Lord Graham. Her thoughts were dazed and tangled as the candlelight returned.

She looked quickly around the room, but Dimitri was gone. Carissa knew that he would not be back. In the silence of the flickering candlelight, Carissa covered her face with her hands and wept.

Notes

[1] A character who becomes a shade takes new personality traits, becoming sober, moody, cynical, and suspicious. Because of these traits, the character's charisma drops. To determine the exact penalty, divide the character's charisma score by three (rounding down), then

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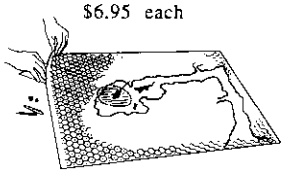

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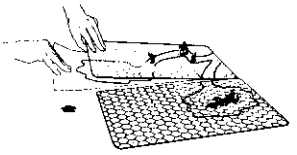

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subtract this number from the original charisma score to get the new charisma score.

The character's comeliness drops due to his new appearance: dark eyes, gray skin, black clothes, etc. Determine the comeliness penalty in the same way as the charisma penalty. Only drow elves are immune from the comeliness penalty, since the change in appearance leaves their skin no darker than before, and only affects their eyes and hair color.

[2] No cleric of good alignment will turn a person into a shade, whether the person is willing or not. A neutral-evil cleric is 50% likely to intentionally kill the character during the process, and a chaotic-evil cleric is 75% likely to kill the character. To perform the transformation, the cleric must be at least 10th level.

[3] The process for becoming a shade begins on the Prime Material Plane, where the would-be shade drinks lethal poison and dies. The cleric then uses *plane shift* to transport himself and the character to the Plane of Shadow. There, the cleric casts neutralize *poison* on the character, and then *imbue with spell ability* if the character is not a member of a spell-casting class. The cleric then casts *negative plane protection* to allow the forces of the Positive and Negative Material Planes to enter the character's body, thus causing the physical, psychological, and magical changes. At last, the cleric casts *raise dead* (this spell even works on elves and half-orcs due to the interference of the energies from the Positive and Negative Material Planes). The character must make a successful resurrection survival check or die again — permanently.

The character now needs to recover, as noted in the description of the *raise dead* spell. Afterwards, he is a full shade, complete with special powers, special abilities, and all other effects as explained in the *Monster Manual II* and in this article.

[4] A shade cannot gain experience points, cannot increase in class level or proficiency, and cannot gain new levels of spell ability. The mixture of the Positive and Negative Material Planes holds the shade forever at the same class level, also making him immune to magical increases or decreases in level.

[5] For the class of a random shade, roll 1d20 on Table 1. For the shade's alignment, use Table 2; roll 1d4 + 6 for assassins, or 1d10 for other classes. The shade's level and equipment should be chosen in accordance with the PC party's strength.

The ability scores of a shade can be determined by the chart on page 74 of *Unearthed Arcana.* Note that the charisma and comeliness scores need to be adjusted as with any other character who has become a shade.

When determining the experience-point value of an NPC shade *(Dungeon Masters Guide,* page 85), consider the shade status to be an exceptional ability. Ω

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The Ecology of the Yeti

Cold-blooded in every respect

by Thomas Kiefer

"Great gods of winter," breathed the heavily clothed figure as he fought screaming winds to squeeze shut the door behind him. "Nothing worse than a breeze on flat snow." He turned to face into the room he had just entered. "Hiya, Echord. How'ya doing?"

The bespectacled, seemingly middle-aged man seated at the desk across the room looked up from his book as his friend brushed snow off his parka. "Can't complain." He paused long enough to take a folded piece of parchment from the desk and mark his place with it before closing the book. "I haven't seen you here in a while, Filnan. You still haven't learned to knock."

Filnan ignored this comment as he moved toward his scholarly friend and sank into a chair across from him. "I got to talk to you about something important," he began, pulling back his hood and ruffling his thick blond hair with a mittened hand. Ice cracked on his beard and hung unnoticed from his bushy eyebrows. "Did you hear that we're all having trouble again? Folks just a ways north of Mak-Tsu-Shung are complaining that snow-people from World's End Peaks have started coming down on raids. We've even had a few drop in ourselves. Some folks've been hurt — some others killed."

The older man waited, expecting Filnan to say more. When Filnan failed to pick up the conversation, the older man sighed. "That's terrible news, my friend, but why come to me? You knew that might eventually happen when you decided to move up there. World's End is the homeland of every frost-beast there is. You even told me so. If those creatures intend to come down from the peaks and attack, there's not much I can do about it."

The two stared at one another without anger. Ten years of life in this mountainous land of glaciers, bone-cold wind, and reticent people had burned away all but a deep and abiding sense of respect for one another. Not that they ever saw eye to eye, Echord thought.

"Look," Filnan said, shifting in his seat, "we really do need some help here; I'm serious. The only things I know for sure about abominable snowmen are that you never see 'em till they're right on you, they look like big white monkeys, and they like to tear people into little pieces and stuff them into their mouths. That doesn't help us do anything about it. The folks around Mak-Tsu-Shung — you know them. They're not fighters at all — their grandaddies, maybe, but now they're just tundra villagers, goat herders. Those walking snowballs aren't gonna call off their raids just 'cause the fight ain't fair. We gotta know what to do about it. I have a family and friends there now."

Echord looked thoughtful and nodded, eyes fixed on Filnan. "I imagine that's what

keeps the snow-people coming back every so often. They prefer a meal that fights ineffectively. Up there by the Worlds End, you're it."

Filnan grimaced and turned away. "No doubt. Well, that's why I came here. We don't know much about them. But you—"

" '—are a sage, you read a lot, and you might know something useful,' " Echord finished for him, and smiled in a tired sort of way. He shuffled the papers about his desk to create a suitable place to leave his book, then arose and walked to the bookcase that covered half the east wall. "I do seem to remember having something concerning these creatures. Bought it from a caravan mage. Living as close to the yeti as we do, I thought it might someday come in handy," He stopped his search to pull one relatively small and slim book from the line-up. "Ah, here we are."

Blowing the dust off the cover, the scholar walked back to his seat and settled in his place, opening the creaking book. "In case you haven't noticed, this is not the most-used volume of my collection," he said, leafing through the first few pages. "But its contents are not totally alien to me. Let's see what we can come up with."

Filnan sat back as he watched his friend at work. Echord had always been the intelligent one, ever since their youth. Each dive into the depths of knowledge was like a game, even when the stakes were considerable, as they were now. Echord hated to come up short on information — to "lose." He took his studying very seriously. His knowledge and Filnan's sword arm had kept them both alive here after their fellow adventurers were lost to an avalanche, many years ago. Now, neither man wished to leave this snowbound land. It had its hazards — but it was home.

"Well, this is interesting," the scholar said as he stopped on one page. "Taxonomists have typically associated the yeti with the primates, but the creatures also appear to share certain characteristics with bears. According to this, their ancestry may be of one or the other, or possibly a mix of both. The yeti seems to have the instincts of the carnivorous ape and gorilla bear, both of which may be distant relatives.

"Of course, yeti dwell only in very cold climes, it being much more comfortable since their normal body temperatures are much lower than most blooded living creatures." Echord read a bit more and chewed his lower lip. "Their peculiar internal biological processes require cold atmosphere to maintain life, and in turn produce an even colder one. They'll live in plains, hills, or other areas of extreme cold. They're hard to spot in the snow-covered plains . . . white fur, of course. . . . Hmm. They also seem to be smart enough to learn to use this to their advantage, and so gain surprise when they hunt. And they like shallow caves."

Echord raised a finger as he read, as if lecturing to one of his classes long ago at his academy. " 'It seems that the yeti are quite fierce and aggressive in their disposition, but among their own kind they are said to be quite congenial. Should they happen to encounter any other beast or being, they respond fiercely, to ward away the threat before they attack. They beat on their chests, hurl stones, strut about, flail their arms, and hoot loudly in a manner which echoes for great distances. If the intruders do not leave, they are soon surrounded and attacked. If they do leave, they are stalked and attacked soon enough. Any meeting with these creatures is bound to lead to conflict.' "

"I'll remember that next time I drop in on them," the younger man murmured with a sigh. He rubbed his face, removing the last of the melting snow. These details were not what Filnan had come to hear, but he knew Echord's thorough, methodical nature of investigation was unstoppable, even when it was not necessary. Before he had even opened his friend's front door, Filnan had already resigned himself to waiting patiently until the desired material arose. In the meantime, he sat back and waited for revelation.

Echord simply continued. " 'Unlike most other primates, the yeti do not care for their young long after birth. Usually, the young must fend for themselves at an early age, looking and fighting for food and such. This makes them strong, fierce — and rare as well. These beasts are not particular about what meat they eat, though one of their favorite meals is human flesh.' "

"So I've noticed," Filnan mumbled.

" 'The yeti are quite strong and are not ones to be toyed with by the careless. The physical strength of the average yeti is comparable to that of a hill giant, which is greater than that of any human alive.

" ' Additionally, they have a special talent for inducing great fright in their opponents. More than a few who have survived yeti encounters have testified to an unnatural sense of horror upon gazing into a snowman's pale eyes. The majority agree to the description of it as a mind-chilling sensation, leaving the blood as water and the skeleton as jelly, though not everyone is affected in exactly the same manner. The most experienced of fighting men seem to have some resistance to this power, however.' " He glanced up. "Still, I wouldn't suggest you go out and wrestle with one, no matter how good you are!'

"Don't worry," the visitor dryly assured his host. "I wasn't planning on it. Anything in there about how to stop them from rampaging through small towns?"

"Patience, my friend. Unless you can tell me that we have a hungry yeti grumbling at my doorstep, you've nothing to lose by being patient." Readjusting his reading glasses, Echord returned to the text of his book. "Well, since the yeti is a cold-blooded, cold-dwelling creature, I would imagine that heat would not please one. Have you tried lighting fires around town? Bonfires on the outskirts at night? How about fire arrows? Anybody up there know how to prepare them?"

Filnan stared into space for a moment. "Fire," he finally said. "Of course. It wouldn't be too difficult to . . ." Filnan's voice trailed off, his visage darkening a bit as he glanced at the wind-whipped snow flying beyond the clouded windowpane. "But I'm not sure how long that'd last. It's a bit beyond a kite-flying breeze out there. As for fire arrows — they make more sense, but I have no pitch to prepare effective ones for combat purposes. The lamp oil here is useless for this sort of thing. And if I can't do it, no one can, since I'm still the best archer in town, in case you haven't heard lately."

"No, I haven't heard lately, but I can always count on you for that, eh?" Echord turned back to the flipping of pages. "You know, I see nothing about it in here, but it seems to me that if you raise a creature's body temperature enough above normal, it'll eventually die, right?"

"Yeah, sure." Filnan was mumbling again. "I had an uncle die from green fever, remember?"

"Of course I do." The man was beginning to take on the distant look he always did when he was thinking hard. "The human body temperature is fairly high. Your uncle's just went a little too high and stayed there a little too long. But though the yeti's internal temperature is much lower, it can still get a fever?

Filnan's wandering eyes came to rest on Echord again. "That's true. But I hope this is leading somewhere?

"Well," Echord continued, looking down at the book, "I'm not — ah, here it is." He stopped turning pages and settled a finger on the top part of one. "You've fought yeti, right? Have you ever noticed that a yeti seems to radiate cold about him?"

Filnan looked away and half-smiled, but he didn't look amused. "Yeah. I got into a fight with one. I was with my boy Mahong when he was playing in the snow. Thought I heard something, drew my sword, turned around, and the damned thing was right there behind me. Before I could move, it had smacked my sword away, knocked me down, and was about to tear my face off when old Torkens ran up and jammed his spear through its neck. I think the yeti cracked a rib on me, but the cold was worse than being crushed. That ugly thing was colder than the Hells' eighth plane. And you know what? Mahong thought it was all so funny that he just laughed and laughed."

Echord chuckled softly. "That sounds like your boy. But a creature cannot actually radiate cold. Cold isn't really a presence of something, it's an absence of something — heat, actually energy of a sort. Nothing can radiate a lack of something."

Filnan looked confused but thoughtful. "I think I follow you, but I definitely hurt more from cold than from having my chest mashed in when that yeti got me."

"True." Echord took on his patient expression, like a teacher explaining an elusive concept to a student. "But nevertheless, cold isn't radiated; not like that, anyway. Still, because of its low body temperature, if a yeti were to find itself in surroundings where the temperature was higher than its own, it would pick up some of the heat. Heat energy travels from areas of greater concentration – warm areas – to areas of lesser concentration – cool areas – like any other diffusing action."

"You're losing me," Filnan warned.

"I'm simply saying that the yeti doesn't radiate cold, but that, by way of a kinetic vacuum of sorts, it absorbs the heat. The temperature of the surroundings drops, losing energy, while that same energy is absorbed by the yeti, whose internal temperature rises slightly."

"You mean that if a snowman drained enough people of their body heat, it might get a fever? I'm not sure I'd want to experiment with that."

Echord assumed his patient look again. "Not necessarily body heat; the heat energy can come from virtually anywhere. How well are your homes heated?"

"Not all that well, really. We've let things slide a bit since the yeti attacks started, and the wind's caused some damage to the walls and roofs. We're thinking more about defense lately. Some of the guys have been thinking about building a palisade around the town, or hauling rocks in by sled for walls. Bad neighbors from Worlds End and all that."

"Maybe you should look into better heating. It could be that your fireplaces are keeping out more than frostbite. The yeti would dare not get close to a really warm area."

The younger man looked startled. His eyes began to brighten. "Yeah, that makes sense."

"The very sight of fire itself might deter them from attack, in fact," Echord continued. "Maybe a heated metal fence would help guard the rest of the town better than a big wooden fence – if you're very careful about its design and construction, that is. Most metals are wonderful conductors of heat, you know."

"Yeah," Filnan repeated, sitting forward in his chair. "You know, there's a group of gnomes a few miles from town. They probably have a metal shop back in their caves. I haven't seen 'em around much, but they might be friendly enough to help. . . . This just might work." His eyes returned to his friends face as his voice regained its vigor. "Would you mind coming over to Mak-Tsu-Shung and explaining all this to the guys? They're not likely to listen to all this coming from strong-but-uneducated me. It'll sound a little more reasonable from you; they know you. Maybe you could help design this stuff, too."

Echord let out a long sigh as he closed the yeti book on a finger, suddenly recalling Filnan's lack of appreciation for the figuring and details involved in mechanics and sciences. He always treated it like some mathematized branch of magic whose workings were best left to others. The idea Echord had proposed was vague, at best, and would need work; after all, he had just mentioned it off the top of his head less than a minute ago. But Filnan seemed to be getting somewhat excited over it already, and knowing him as Echord did, he wouldn't likely calm down until the plan's execution was underway.

"I suppose so," he finally assented. "Maybe tomorrow afternoon. I've nothing that absolutely demands my attention then." He pulled his finger from the book as he rose to return it to its place among its fellows. When he turned back, he saw that Filnan was also on his feet, his face revealing a relieved grin.

"A heated wall sounds like crazy stuff, but only you could make it work. You always were the one to figure out a puzzle." Filnan clasped Echord's hand when he walked back. "Thanks a lot. I can't wait to see the guys' reactions. Y'know, they didn't believe you could help us at all. We thought we were gonna die."

"Glad to help," Echord assured him, following Filnan to the door. "But keep in mind, a heated wall won't be foolproof by any means. It's more of a general deterrent. You will still have to keep on your toes. In the meantime, why don't I give you the name of a friend of mine who specializes in preparing certain types of fire arrows. . . ."

Notes

Yeti are actually biological relatives of both the lower primates and the bears. They are most closely related to the mountain gorilla, to which many of the yeti's typical habits and instincts might be compared. Yeti mate and bear young much as do any other lower primates. After that, the young stay with the parents for only two years after birth; they don't stay dependent on their parents as long as do most other primates. Any young encountered with a group of yeti will typically be just old enough to fight effectively on their own. This early separation and independence from the parents causes them to to hunt for food at a relatively early age, limits their population growth to those strong enough to survive, and accounts for part of their racial ferocity.

Female and male adults have the same sorts of AD&D® game statistics. Yeti become adults at five years of age. Young yeti (at two, three, and four years of age) have 1+ 1 to 3 + 3 HD, and do l-2/1-2, 1-3/1-3, or 1-4/1-4 hp damage with their claws. Chill damage from young yeti amounts to 1-6, 2-8, or 2-12 hp damage. The power to frighten opponents by gaze only comes with full adulthood. All yeti are immune to cold attacks because of their thick fur and

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fat layers, as well as from their unique biology.

If a yeti is captured at an early age, cared for, fed properly (they have voracious appetites) and kept in a suitable arctic climate, the creature could be tamed and raised in much the same manner as any other domesticated animal. Usually, such domesticated yeti will follow their instincts and leave "home" after a few years for the icy wilderness. As a result of their early domestication, however, these yeti are often less ferocious than the average abominable snowman. Those yeti that stay at home (30%) grow up to be very loyal to their caretakers.

The strength of a typical yeti may be determined with a 1d12 as follows: 1 = 18/90-99, 2-4 = 18/00, 5-9 = 19, l0-12 = 20. The only weapons a yeti will use are hurled rocks, which gain bonuses to damage from this great strength. A hurled rock does a base of 2-8 hp damage, has a range of 120 yards (40 yards being the short-range limit and 80 yards the medium-range limit), and is about 6" in diameter, weighing about l0-12 lbs. Yeti hurl them with one hand like shot-puts.

According to the *Monster Manual*, any creature surprised by a yeti in combat must save vs. paralyzation to avoid looking into the yeti's pale blue or colorless eyes. Anyone failing such a save becomes "rigid with fright for 3 melee rounds and can be automatically struck twice and squeezed by the yeti." This effect does not take place against creatures which are normally immune to fear of any sort, including cavaliers, most undead, and generally mindless creatures. It is believed that the unusual crystalline coloring, together with a strange and faint pulsating of light within the creature's eyes, is responsible for this effect. Such pulsating dies when the yeti does, thus ending any more fear-striking gazes from the creature.

Also stated in the *Monster Manual* is the yeti's particular vulnerability to fire, as it takes 150% damage from any such attacks. This also applies to any other form of heat-based attacks. Yeti aren't particularly bright nor fearful, but usually stay away from fire and other obvious sources of heat, for they realize this weakness and take pains to avoid it.

Yeti absorb heat from their surroundings. If grabbed by a yeti, as described in the *Monster Manual*, a victim suffers 2-16 hp cold damage. After a yeti has caused chill damage equal to its own hit-point total, it begins to feel weak, suffering – 1 on "to hit" rolls and an additional – 1 for each additional 8 hp chill damage caused. This chill damage is actually causing the yeti to warm up internally, disrupting its metabolism. When this "to hit" penalty reaches – 6, the yeti passes out, becoming feverish and remaining unconscious for 2-12 turns. At – 9, the yeti dies from severe overheating. Generally, it takes about three turns for a yeti to recover from each – 1 of "to hit" loss suffered, providing the creature is still alive. This condition may also be inflicted by absorbing heat from sources other than people. Greater sources of such heat contribute more than the 2-16 hp drained from humans, just as relatively cooler sources contribute less. Heat or fire attacks contribute half their unadjusted (prior to the addition of the extra 50%) damage value in addition to the 150% damage taken.

This cold radiation fades away gradually after a yeti dies. The internal biological and chemical functions which maintain such an extremely low body temperature eventually cease within a dead yeti, and the body then begins to approach the temperature of its surroundings, thus decreasing the effect of the radiation of cold. In terms of hit points, the damage inflicted is typically reduced by 10% for every two turns that the yeti has been dead (this may be adjusted up or down in unusually warm or cool air temperatures). Consequently, two turns after death, cold damage from a yeti will be multiplied by .9, by .8 after four turns, .7 after six, etc. After 20 turns, the yeti's internal temperature will be close enough to the surroundings' that cold damage will be nil, and the body may be safely investigated. Ω

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The Ecology of the Aboleth

The type best known is also the least dangerous

by Brandon Grist

The following information on aboleth is based on testimony given to a group of adventurers by the dark-elf sage Alzor, just hours before his mysterious disappearance. Alzor was known to be fair and honest, and his information about the Underdark and its denizens had always been reliable.

The aboleth are perhaps the least well-known and the most misunderstood of all the races which inhabit the Underdark. The reason for this is very simple — the aboleth want it that way. The bulk of their population dwells in seclusion in the great, sunless seas found deep beneath the surface of the earth. Only the weakest aboleth are encountered near the surface, and it is from these creatures that the vast majority of surface-dwellers have drawn what little knowledge they have of this race. Because of the unfortunate misconceptions which arise from this practice, it is necessary to explain the true nature of the aboleth.

In general, all aboleth are cruel, emotionless, and logical. All are extremely intelligent — some even more so than the most ancient of elven mages. They are believed to live for thousands of years, but exact information is difficult to gain for obvious reasons.[1] Over their many years of existence, the aboleth have developed a society which far exceeds that of man in its efficiency. In this society, each aboleth has a specific duty which it performs with the utmost skill. There are four major roles in the aboleth society. In increasing order of importance, these roles are: slave-gathering, slave maintenance, scientific research and experimentation, and ruling.

The role of slave-gathering is delegated to the common aboleth with which most surface-dwellers are familiar.[2] Such an aboleth resembles a large, blue-green fish which lacks all fins but the caudal. It has a head with three large, slitlike eyes and four long tentacles. Its mouth is like a great sucker and can be found on the underside of the head section. On each of its sides can be found four tubelike orifices which excrete a vile slime. This common aboleth is about 20′ long from tail to head, and has 10′-long tentacles. It is clumsy on land and is usually encountered in underground lakes. Despite its good combat abilities, this creature prefers to attack with a mental ability which allows it to *enslave* those with weak minds. It also possesses illusion-casting abilities used to hide itself while hunting for slaves. In general, it is wise not to get close to one of these creatures, for not only is the slime they excrete hazardous to all air-breathing creatures, but their very skin can cause serious tissue damage if touched to exposed flesh. It is important to note that these slave-gathering monsters are also the *weakest* of their kind.

Slaves gathered by the common aboleth are routinely brought back to certain floating cities in these underground seas in which the more powerful aboleth dwell.[3] This collection process, along with further maintenance of slaves, is the responsibility of the greater aboleth. These creatures resemble their lesser brothers in every way, but are considerably larger. They average 30′ in length and weigh several tons. They are also more intelligent than the common aboleth. They have most of the same powers possessed by the common aboleth, but their *enslavement* ability is more developed. Generally speaking, anyone *enslaved* by one of these creatures never sees the upper world again. There may be as many as a dozen of these creatures in a single aboleth city, each maintaining a separate group of slaves.

The purpose of slaves in the aboleth society is quite different from what would normally be expected. Though slaves may have been used originally to aid in the construction of aboleth cities, these cities generally lack any kind of significant slave population. Instead, most slaves dwell on the shores of the lakes on which the cities float. There, the slaves serve both as guards and as playthings for the cruel aboleth, who pit slaves against one another in strange spectacles of combat. The exact purpose of this practice is not clear, though it may be a way of eliminating the weak in the breeding of a race of subterranean slaves.

In order to fully understand the next major class in aboleth society, that of the noble, it is first necessary to establish the point that the aboleth have chosen the path of science over that of magic. Consequently, they have no wizards or conjurers as do other races. Noble aboleth, the scientists of the race, are fantastically intelligent and ever seek to increase their powers through bizarre means.[4] In general, they are similar in appearance to the common aboleth. Unlike common aboleth, noble aboleth have an enlarged head section, and they have two slender arms, each ending in three highly dextrous fingers, instead of their two uppermost tentacles. These latter appendages are used for more delicate work.[5] These scientist-types possess most of the other abilities common to aboleth, as well as a few mental powers which are useful in their research. Though the full extent of the aboleth's scientific knowledge can only be guessed at, it is certain that it is, at the very least, comparable to the magical knowledge possessed by the dwellers of the upper world. Each city usually holds about half a dozen of these noble aboleth.

The last major role in aboleth society is that of command, which is the responsibility of the greatest class of aboleth. Physically, ruler aboleth resemble common aboleth, but each is about 40′ long and more intelligent than even the nobles. Each city has but one ruler, and it is his job to maintain order. To better accomplish this, the ruler has some sort of mental link with all of his subjects.[6] As their knowledge increases, so does the ruler's. Rulers possess all other aboleth abilities and should be regarded as dangerous in the extreme.

An aboleth feeds mainly on microscopic organisms which abound in its natural habitat, but it can also consume larger prey if necessary.[7] Aboleth can survive in both air and water, but prefer water for obvious reasons. Every aboleth has both male and female reproductive organs, though mating is rare and is restricted between aboleth of the same class.[8]

Because of their nonmagical nature, aboleth have a measure of resistance to spells similar to the spell-resistance of dwarves. This resistance grows greater as the aboleth's size and power increase.[9] All aboleth have psionic powers commensurate with their level of intelligence, and the most intelligent have powers which rival those of the illithids who, like all of the other subterranean races, have a healthy fear of the aboleth.

In closing, it is worthy to note that rumors exist of a grand aboleth, a creature so immense that it dwarfs even the rulers. If so, then perhaps it is better that surface and subterranean dwellers alike leave the aboleth to do as they please.

Notes

1. Common aboleth have a life span of about 2,000 years. Greater and noble aboleth live to be about 3,000 years old. Rulers can live as long as five millennia, while the grand aboleth may well be immortal.

2. The common aboleth is simply the monster as outlined in the *Monster Manual II*, with slight modifications as noted herein. The illusion-casting power mentioned in this paragraph is equal to the ability to cast *phantasmal force* (with auditory effects as well as visual ones) at will, once per round.

3. When a common aboleth enslaves a total of seven creatures (regardless of their hit dice), a greater and noble aboleth arrive using *probability travel* and take the slaves back to their city. Each greater aboleth has as many as five common aboleth gathering slaves for it. It takes from 2-8 turns for the greater and noble aboleth to arrive, though they are alerted immediately by *telepathy* when the quota is met.

4. Nobles use their ability of *probability travel*, as well as many strange drugs and devices, to travel to alternate Prime Material planes. There they amass as much knowledge as possible while *enslaving* any who oppose them. Occasionally, several nobles and a dozen or so common aboleth mount a raid into a particularly promising world, but this is rare.

5. These appendages are also capable of using technological items. The aboleth nobles have developed several potent offensive weapons and do not hesitate to use them if they feel the need exists. Note that they do not care for magic, and will not use items such as wands, rods, staves, etc. Magical treasures are locked in vaults as curios or are destroyed.

6. This *telepathy* has a range of 100 miles and allows complete communication with all subject aboleth in that range. Note that all other types of aboleth can and do communicate by telepathic means, though this has a range of no more than 20 miles and must be used consciously. They can also communicate with other intelligent creatures by these means, with a range of 100 yards, but seldom do so.

7. The aboleth does not have an effective biting attack because of the position of its mouth. If, for some reason, its opponent is immobilized, the aboleth may elect to consume its victim. If it chooses to do so, it receives but one biting attack per round. Damage varies with the type of aboleth; common ones do 3-18 hp damage per bite and swallow whole on a roll of 20, greater and noble aboleth do 4-24 hp damage and swallow whole on a roll of 19 or 20, and ruler aboleth do 5-30 hp damage and swallow whole on a role of 18, 19 or 20. The grand aboleth never attacks in this way. Those swallowed take one quarter of their maximum normal hit points in damage each round until they die.

8. Most aboleth mate about once every 500 years. Each participant has one egg which it deposits in a safe place about a week after fertilization. This egg is surrounded by a thick cocoon of slime that protects and nourishes the egg. The egg begins about the size of a human head, but over the course of five years it grows to be about 6′ long. At this point, the aboleth hatches and begins a quick, one-year mutation into a miniature version of its parent. It takes about 10 more years before the aboleth reaches its adult stage, and during this time it is carefully guarded by other aboleth or, occasionally, by slaves. Ruler aboleth mate only once in their lives, and the growth process takes a total of about one hundred years, though it is the same in its various stages. Some noble aboleth have performed occasional cloning experiments, but one has yet to meet with any great success.

9. Because of their nonmagical nature, all aboleth gain a bonus to save versus spells equal to their hit dice divided by four, rounded up. This applies to all aboleth, including common ones (which get a bonus of +2). Also note that rulers and the grand aboleth are immune to some illusions due to their high intelligence.

GREATER ABOLETH

FREQUENCY: *Extremely rare*
NO. APPEARING: *1-3 (7-12 in city)*
ARMOR CLASS: *3*
MOVE: *3"//21"*
HIT DICE: *12-14*
% IN LAIR: *90%*
TREASURE TYPE: *A (x2) (with /R, S, T, U in city)*
NO. OF ATTACKS: *4 tentacles*
DAMAGE/ATTACK: *4-10 (x4)*
SPECIAL ATTACKS: *See below*
SPECIAL DEFENSES: *See below*
MAGIC RESISTANCE: *Standard*
INTELLIGENCE: *Exceptional*
ALIGNMENT: *Lawful evil*
SIZE: *L*
PSIONIC ABILITY: *280*
Attack/Defense Modes: *B, C, D, E/F, G, I, J*
LEVEL/XP VALUE: *12 HD: VIII/4,400 + 16 per hit point; 13-14 HD: IX/6,100 + 18 per hit point*

Greater aboleth are simply larger, more intelligent versions of the common aboleth. They are normally only encountered in an aboleth city, although they are occasionally found in some other underground locale pursuing some strange, dark purpose. Their purpose in the aboleth society is to control the slave population, which they do with unrelenting cruelty. They possess *enslavement* powers superior to those of common aboleth, having a range of 60′ and usable a number of times per day equal to the aboleth's hit dice. The save vs. spells is at -4, and only a *limited wish*, *wish*, or *alter reality* spell can counter it (though *enslavement* ends if the aboleth is killed as well). If more than two miles ever separate slave and master, the slave is entitled to another saving throw (still at -4). A hit from the tentacle of a greater aboleth has the same effect as that of the common aboleth, though its size

and strength result in 4-10 rather than 1-6 hp damage per hit. Greater aboleth produce slime just as the common aboleth, but in a 2′ radius. Greater aboleth possess the psionic disciplines of *body equilibrium*, *ESP*, *levitation*, and *dimension door*, all at a level of mastery equal to their hit dice.

The illusion-casting power of a greater aboleth is its ability to cast *improved phantasmal force* once per round, with auditory and visual effects, at will.

NOBLE ABOLETH

FREQUENCY: *Extremely rare*
NO. APPEARING: *1-2 (3-8 in city)*
ARMOR CLASS: *3*
MOVE: *3"//15"*
HIT DICE: *16-28*
% IN LAIR: *95%*
TREASURE TYPE: *E, F, X (with R, S, T, V in city)*
NO. OF ATTACKS: *4 tentacles*
DAMAGE/ATTACK: *2-16 (x2)/2-5 (x2)*
SPECIAL ATTACKS: *See below*
SPECIAL DEFENSES: *See below*
MAGIC RESISTANCE: *Standard*
INTELLIGENCE: *Genius*
ALIGNMENT: *Lawful evil*
SIZE: *L*
PSIONIC ABILITY: *310*
Attack/Defense Modes: *All/all*
LEVEL/X.P. VALUE: *16 HD: IX/8,100 + 20/hp; 17-18 HD: X/10,100 + 25 per hit point*

The noble aboleth is an extremely powerful version of the common aboleth which has mutated in several ways so as to accomplish its duties. It is almost never encountered outside an aboleth city, where its role is that of the scientist. It does research, conducts experiments, and travels to alternate worlds to gather information. There are two major differences in appearance between the noble and common aboleth. First, the noble aboleth's head is slightly larger than that of a common or greater aboleth. This makes its movement through water a bit more difficult. Second, two of the noble's tentacles are smaller and end in three fingers, which allow it to do very complicated and delicate work. These tentacles can still be used in combat, but they also can be used to manipulate items or devices (though they never use melee weapons). A hit from any of these tentacles has the same effect as a hit from a common aboleth. Nobles have *enslavement* abilities equal to those of common aboleth and secrete slime in a 3′ radius. They possess the ability to cast *spectral force* spells at will, once per round. Noble aboleth have very powerful psionic abilities and can use the disciplines of *body equilibrium*, *cell adjustment*, *ESP*, *body control*, and *probability travel*. All of these disciplines are performed at a level of mastery equal to the aboleth's hit dice.

The exact nature of the various technological weaponry and devices created by noble aboleth is left to the DM to design. Helpful guidelines may be found in DRAGON® issue #114 ("Hi-tech Hijinks," page 84). Most such devices should parallel or duplicate magical devices in effect.

RULER ABOLETH

FREQUENCY: *Extremely rare*
NO. APPEARING: *1*
ARMOR CLASS: *1*
MOVE: *3"//21"*
HIT DICE: *20-22*
% IN LAIR: *100%*
TREASURE TYPE: *H, R, S, T, V*
NO. OF ATTACKS: *4*
DAMAGE/ATTACK: *5-20 (x 4)*
SPECIAL ATTACKS: *See below*
SPECIAL DEFENSES: *See below*
MAGIC RESISTANCE: *Standard*
INTELLIGENCE: *Supra-genius*
ALIGNMENT: *Lawful evil*
SIZE: *L*
PSIONIC ABILITY: *340*
Attack/Defense Modes: *All/all*
LEVEL/X.P. VALUE: *20 HD: X/15,700 + 30 per hit point; 21-22 HD: X/19,200 + 35 per hit point*

These huge, bloated monstrosities are the largest and most intelligent of all aboleth (aside from the grand aboleth). Each rules an aboleth city and is never encountered anywhere else, except when it must mate (and must therefore travel to another city using psionic means). Its telepathic link with its subjects allows it to be constantly aware of everything going on in its realm. Rulers are, in most other respects, similar to common and greater aboleth. They possess *enslavement* abilities equal to those of greater aboleth and can generate *veil* spells at will. Rulers can generate slime in a 5′ radius, and the mere sight of one causes *fear* in all beings of less than 5th level or five hit dice. They have extremely potent psionics and may use the disciplines of *body equilibrium*, *cell adjustment*, *clairvoyance*, *ESP*, *astral projection*, *body control*, and *dimension door* at a level of mastery equal to their hit dice.

GRAND ABOLETH

FREQUENCY: *Unique*
NO. APPEARING: *1*
ARMOR CLASS: *0*
MOVE: *3"//24"*
HIT DICE: *40 (182 hp)*
% IN LAIR: *100%*
TREASURE TYPE: *H (x2), R, S, T (x2), V*
NO. OF ATTACKS: *4*
DAMAGE/ATTACK: *5-30 (x4)*
SPECIAL ATTACKS: *See below*
SPECIAL DEFENSES: *See below*
MAGIC RESISTANCE: *Standard*
INTELLIGENCE: *Godlike*
ALIGNMENT: *Lawful evil*
SIZE: *L*
PSIONIC ABILITY: *370*
Attack/Defense Modes: *All/all*
LEVEL/XP VALUE: *X/32,000*

The grand aboleth is quite simply the largest aboleth in existence on a particular world. It is not only incredibly huge (about

RULER ABOLETH

70′ long with ten 30′-long tentacles), but also vastly intelligent. It has a telepathic link with every ruler aboleth on its world (within a range of 10,000 miles), effectively giving it complete knowledge of all that goes on within its empire. It can attack physically with great effect and exudes slime in a 20′ radius. Its psionic powers are unmatched by any other aboleth, and it has the disciplines of *body equilibrium*, *cell adjustment*, *detection of good or evil*, *detection of magic*, *ESP*, *levitation*, *mind over body*, *astral projection*, *body control*, *energy control*, and *probability travel*, all performed at the 25th level of mastery. The grand aboleth also has *enslavement* powers equal to those of a greater aboleth and can create very effective illusions (save at -4). This monster dwells in a vast chamber in the midst of the largest aboleth city, which floats on the lowest portion of the worlds underground seas.

The illusion powers of the grand aboleth are equivalent to the spell capability of an 18th-level illusionist. The choice of the monster's spells are left to the DM to decide. The grand aboleth may also generate *veil* spells at will, one per round.

Final note

This article is intended to make the aboleth not only more complete, but more powerful. It is important to bear in mind at all times that the aboleth are extremely intelligent and have managed to maintain their control of the lowest depths of the Underdark for many thousands of years. No party of bold adventurers should ever be able to topple this mighty empire with ease. The grand aboleth is included only as the icing on the cake; actually meeting it would be nearly impossible, and it would require heroic effort to overcome.

Illustrations by Jim Holloway

GRAND ABOLETH

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The Ecology of the Hook Horror

The dwellers in the darkness

Illustration by Jim Holloway

by Michael Persinger

From an address by the esteemed scholar Ferba to the assembled Guild of Naturalists of Quardolf City:

Understandably, little research has been done on the creature we know as the hook horror. I have spent the last few months laboring to learn all I can of this creature's habits and, as you can see, my colleagues have supplied me with a perfect, albeit dead, fully grown specimen. Take a good look, for few specimens exist in such an excellently preserved state.

The monster is bipedal and of ogre size, this specimen being 9'2" tall. Its head resembles a bony vulture's head with a crest of red feathers at its neck. At each wrist (where one would expect to find a hand) is a large metallic-gray talon and a tuft of red feathers. Its chest and back are protected by thick, natural plating. The beast's arms and legs are covered with a similar material, though of lesser strength.

I would like to call your attention to the armor plating that covers the creature's body. Constructed of chitinous material, these plates function as the hook horror's bones — an exoskeleton similar in many respects to those of the common grasshopper, crab, and most arthropods. This mail-like material becomes exceedingly strong with the buildup of calcium deposits from the creature's diet — deposits that rival dwarven steel for strength — and this armor has deflected many a sword. So powerful is this creature's exoskeleton that a few blacksmiths have experimentally crafted the plates into suits of armor[1], and a few ogres from the great caverns to the north have used crude forms of such suits in battle.

But forgive me; we are a guild of naturalists. Associating with my bodyguards — without them I would not be able to safely carry out my observances — has moved me to think in their perspective. Violence is not our way, and I shall refrain from further military references.

As you all know, the hook horror — also known over the lands as the vulture beak, hacker, cave dweller, and clacker — makes its abode in dark, isolated areas. The hook horror is found exclusively in subterranean surroundings, with natural cavern complexes and abandoned mines ranking as its most favored lairs. Many of these lairs are linked by the vast subterranean network of tunnels we call the Sunless Realm, where dwell the drow and other vile monstrosities. Though the hook horrors certainly migrate through this kingdom of eternal darkness, we may also speculate that the creature comes aboveground during opportune moments, most especially if the surroundings are a dense forest at nightfall. Yet to date, no specimens have been reported outside underground caverns. Whatever the case, the hook horror rarely associates with creatures other than its own kind.

Now, you may wonder how the hook horrors can see, let alone live, down in such dark abodes. Infravision probably comes to your minds. But unlike most other underground dwellers, hook horrors lack infravision completely. The hook horrors are born with very weak eyes and can only see a few feet in front of them. They are, if you will pardon the cliche, blind as bats. So how do they get around?

Fortunately for the hook horrors, nature has compensated for their limited sight by giving them excellent auditory and olfactory senses. They can hear many times better than a normal man, and even possess a limited form of echolocation, as is used by bats. Their scent-detection ability rivals that of certain bloodhounds. In other words, these senses enable the hook horrors to "see" at least as well as you or I would see with our eyes.[2] Actually, their senses are even better than that. During a recent experiment, one hook horror successfully sniffed out an invisible mage. Another one detected a silently moving thief that no one else could hear. Among other things, these senses make it very difficult for enemies to surprise the hook horror[3] and make it easy for the hook horror to search out food.

As for their eating habits, the hook horrors are herbivores. Their diet is rather selective, consisting primarily of subterranean fungi. They have an abrasive tongue to help their feeding, and they commonly eat whatever lichens, moss, and mushrooms they can find. Hook horrors are very large creatures, and therefore (we initially assumed) eat vast quantities of food each day. But there is only so much fungus in any underground area; a hook horror's food supply, as you no doubt guessed, becomes easily depleted. How does a 9'-tall biped sustain itself over prolonged periods of time?

Direct observation of the hook horror by means of scrying reveals it to be very sluggish — much like the giant sloths I lectured about three seasons ago. A hook horror sleeps roughly half the day and moves about little if not disturbed. Hence, it needs little food to keep it going. Its actual food consumption is shockingly low for a creature its size. A full-grown hook horror consumes roughly three-fourths the amount of food necessary to feed a full-grown man.

Despite this, a hook horror's food supply can still dwindle rapidly. Most hook horrors migrate from cavern to cavern every few months to obtain a fresh food supply from new lairs while fungi regrow in the vacated areas. A few hook horrors have advanced intellectually to the point that they may grow and cultivate fungus within their lairs. These hook horrors usually have at least one garden chamber devoted to this "farming" activity.

If the usual foods cannot be found, the hook horror will turn to other sources, lest it starve. More exotic creatures, such as zygoms, violet fungi, phycomids, and shriekers[4] become the hook horror's daily meal. This may strike you as odd, for common knowledge has it that these fungi are deadly to humans and other creatures. But several reliable accounts have emerged of hook horrors eating these queer plants. Apparently, hook horrors are immune to these plants' powers.

Continuous study of these immunities has led me to suspect that this ability originates from the hook horror's endocrine system. This system contains a gland, located here in the abdomen, that secretes a special hormone. This chemical somehow makes the creature immune to the effects of zygom glue, violet fungi rot, and phycomid infestation. My colleagues and I believe that this gland is 100% effective and have taken extra steps to examine it. Our hope is to tap this glands potential and manufacture a protection against the so-called "fatal fungi." I'm sure you all realize the benefits that such a protection would give toward our study of that botanical area. Our best alchemists and wizards have made attempts to exploit the gland, though these have unfortunately ended in failure.[5] Though we are still working with this project, future success appears uncertain.

The hook horror may be immune to harmful fungi, but it also has an uncanny weakness in health. Tests have shown the hook horror to be unusually susceptible to diseases and parasitic infestations from sources other than fungi,[6] which are usually caught early in life and take a toll over the years. The specimen you see here died of tapeworm parasites. Between disease and the continuous problems of food availability, the hook horror rarely lives past the age of 40.

Hook horrors have very few natural enemies. Because of their infestations and great strength, most carnivores shun them. Only certain indiscriminate predators such as carrion crawlers are bold enough to challenge them. Of course, many hook horrors have been killed while attempting to find food — some by the hazards of underground life, and some by frightened or sword-happy adventurers who are fond of killing all in their path.

The hook horror is one of the few bipeds that reproduces through egg-laying, just as kobolds are known to do. Once every year, a female hook horror lays from one to four eggs in the lair, each about 3" in diameter. They are shaped and colored in mimicry of stones — a disguise against predators — and scattered across the hook horror's lair among ordinary rocks.[7] This camouflage is very effective, and most every egg laid will hatch after a six-month period.

The hook horror grows very quickly during its early years. Born a mere 1' in height, this creature doubles its size after three months and reaches 5' of height within one year. The hook horror's growth levels off afterward, with a height of 6' reached during the next year. It then grows another 1-2' over the next five years. The hook horror reaches its full growth of 9' by its 17th birthday.

The young hook horror becomes highly independent during its early years. It remains with its parents for only about one year. Its second year is one of transition, wherein the hook horror begins to set off on its own without straying too far from its home. By its third year of life, the hook horror is out on its own and is totally independent of its parents. The hook horror attains reproductive ability in its sixth year of life. At this point, it searches out a mate.

Like those of the arthropods it resembles, the hook horror's hard shell does not grow with it. Thus, it must periodically molt. The molting process starts out gradually. Old plates begin to flake off in pieces, a process that accelerates over a two-day period with bigger and bigger plates falling off, until the hook horror's entire exoskeleton is shed. Little conscious effort is used in this shedding; the shell simply falls off like an old scab.

Before the old shell falls off, a new exoskeleton has already begun to form. These new plates are just hard enough to support the hook horror's body and allow for adequate movement. This new exoskeleton is much softer than the old plates, however — not developed enough to serve as full-strength armor — and it offers very little protection to the creature. The hook horror's exoskeleton hardens relatively quickly and achieves its full strength after a couple of days. Until then, the hook horror is quite vulnerable to physical attack.[8]

Frequent references have likened hook horrors to humanoids. This is only in the loosest sense, however. Hook horrors are not mammalian, being invertebrate arthropods with a vaguely humanoid form. The behavior of a hook horror differs much from that of a humanoid, too; the creature relies on its instincts, very much like an animal does. For instance, the hook horror is afraid of fire and loud noises. It is not aggressive by nature, though like any animal, it will fight furiously if attacked.

Despite their animalistic intelligence, these monsters are capable of limited communication between each other. Just how much can be communicated, my colleagues and I have been unable to measure, but it is my guess that they convey only the most rudimentary knowledge.[9] They don't speak like you or I — no, the hook horror "talks" by making clacking noises, an action performed by flexing certain portions of its exoskeleton.

At first impression, these noises appear to be nothing more than bothersome gibberish; but repeated listenings show a definite pattern in these sounds. To the hook horror, these noises mean many different things, depending on the sounds' tone and pitch. The location of food, for example, excites the creature, causing it to emit a steady, high-pitched clacking. The

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location of an enemy, however, angers or alarms the creature, causing it to send low-pitched, unsteady noises. And, most importantly for us, signals of "friendship" are communicated in soft, steady tones. A language specialist is currently working to translate the hook horror's speech patterns; I will of course inform you on his progress.

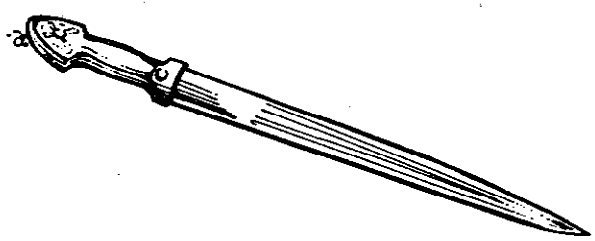
The hook horror prefers the company of small groups, usually no greater than a dozen or so members. These tribes, if you will, do not go out of their way to associate with other subterranean creatures or even with other hook horrors, though hook horrors have been known to form huge "herds" at rare moments, and others have been briefly befriended by humans with gifts of food. However, the hook horror is more of an animal than a rational creature, and it has not yet been truly domesticated. Proper training and rewarding can — and have — brought hook horrors into short service as guards and sentries, but this is a risky business. The hook horror is a primitive creature and has no loyalty or causes to concern it. Past experience with trained hook horrors showed that they follow simple orders, assuming that owners have ways of communicating effectively with them, for proper treatment. But if a situation becomes threatening, hook horrors ignore orders and put self-preservation above all else; a fitting reward for those, I might interject, who exploit the hook horror for making war.

A final note on a curious habit of the hook horror, much reported by adventurers in the Sunless Realms: Hook horrors take some pains to collect silver and electrum when such can be found. Why? Hook horrors eat such coins, which then grind up food in their stomachs much as pebbles in the stomachs of toothless foul. Silver and electrum do not irritate the stomach linings of the hook horrors, and after passing through their digestive systems — no worse for the wear — are deposited in an area near the current lair of the hook-horror tribe. Adventurers have commented on the peculiar, sour odor of such coins, though this has hardly stopped the collection of the same!

And that, my friends, is a summation of the knowledge on the hook horror. Research continues, and new developments are making the study of the hook horror less a mystery. I am eager to inform you of further developments as they come along. Thank you.

Notes

1. To create this armor, a blacksmith or armorer must remove the shell from the hook horror's body. Success is automatic, but if any other person attempts it, the chance of success is only 10% per his



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Hook Horror Statistics (by age)

Age	AC	Move	HD	Damage*	Size
0-3 months	9	3"	½	Nil	1′
3-6 months	8	4"	1-1	1/1	2'
6-12 months	7	6"	1	1-2/1-2	3½'
1-5 years	6	7"	1+1 to 2+2**	1-4/1-4	5'
5-10 years	5	8"	3	1-6/1-6	6'
10-17 years	4	9"	4	1-6/1-6	7½'
17 + years	3	9"	5	1-8/1-8	9'

* From two claw attacks (see the appendix for information on biting attacks).
* * 1 + 1 HD from 1-2 years, 2 HD from 2-3 years, and 2 + 2 HD from 3-5 years.

experience level. This removal is assumed to take one day. Afterward, it takes 30 days for the exoskeleton to be processed into a suit of armor. This armor is AC 3, making its saving throws as bone. Most smiths will buy these exoskeletons for about 100 gp (if still on the body) or 250 gp (if removed). A fully processed suit of armor will sell for about 450 gp. Because hook horrors are 9′ tall, these armor suits are only usable by large creatures (i.e., ogres, large bugbears, verbeeg, etc.).

Note that only the exoskeleton of a full-grown, 5-HD hook horror may be manufactured into a suit of armor. The exoskeleton from a younger hook horror is too soft and weak to be crafted into any armor of worthwhile quality.

2. Because of the hook horror's altered senses, it has saving-throw modifications against certain attacks. Against spells causing blindness (i.e., *light, darkness, color spray, cause blindness,* and *glyph of blindness),* the hook horror receives a +2 saving throw, as its vision is not much used. This bonus is also given against illusions and phantasms that affect only the visual senses. If the hook horror is blinded but wishes to enter combat, it has a penalty of -2 to hit (whereas a normal person would have a -4 to hit). However, against spells that affect the olfactory or auditory senses (i.e., *audible glamer* and high-level phantasms), the hook horror has a -2 saving throw, as its major senses are being affected. A blinded hook horror moves at a maximum rate of 6" unless in familiar territory.

Using echolocation (emitting a high-pitched trill which is picked up by its batlike ears), a hook horror can sense its environment out to 120′ in total darkness, and can detect *invisible* or hidden objects with ease. Anyone trying to silently past a hook horror without using magical *silence* has a -40 penalty to do so, as they hear so well.

3. The FIEND FOLIO® tome states that there is only a 10% chance of surprising a hook horror.

4. Whenever a hook horror's lair is located (usually a temporary affair like a niche in a tunnel), the DM should allow a 50% chance that one of these fungi is located in the general area. There is a 10% chance that the actual lair contain these fungi, kept for nourishment. If a hook horror is met as a wandering monster, chances are that it is searching for food. Allow a 40% chance that one of these plants is within 200′ of the hook horror when the latter is found.

5. Hook horrors are disease and parasite carriers. When encountered, there is a 10% chance that a hook horror has a disease, and another 10% chance that it has 2-5 diseases. The DM must take this into account when determining whether or not the character has caught a disease (as detailed on page 13 of the *DMG).* A hook horror has a +2% chance of catching a random disease or parasitic infestation. Against magical disease attacks (e.g., *cause disease),* it has a -1 saving throw.

6. Ferba's hypothesis is more or less correct: Once a hook horror dies, the gland stops producing this chemical. For game purposes, nothing short of a *wish* will allow PCs to exploit this chemical.

7. When a hook horror lair is discovered, there is a 25% chance that it contains 1-4 eggs, disguised as rocks; only close inspection reveals that they are eggs. Such a lair also contains at least two mated hook horrors.

A hook-horror egg takes six months to hatch, at which time the 1′-tall creature has the following statistics: AC 9; MV 3"; HD ½; #AT nil; AL N. The hook horror remains like this for three months. Afterward, the creature grows in a fairly rapid progression, with subsequent age category beginning with a molting period, as explained in note 8. See the table for details.

8. The hook horror sheds its exoskeleton each time it enters a new age category, as shown in the Hook Horror Statistics table. Once the shell has been removed, the creature is hampered in movement and quite vulnerable to attack. Newly molted hook horrors have temporary penalties of -2 to armor class and -2" to movement rate, and a strong tendency to flee trouble when possible. The new exoskeleton hardens quickly, and the hook horror gains a +1 bonus on armor class and movement for every 12 hours that pass, until the new levels appropriate to its age are reached. Newly hatched hook horrors don't molt immediately after hatching, but are extremely vulnerable anyway and must be protected. Mortality rates for most young hook horrors are high.

9. An *ESP* spell or *telepathy* power gives the user a basic understanding of the hook horror's thoughts, though these only offer the most rudimentary information (usually about food or personal discomfort), and the creature understands only the simplest of data. Hook horrors have a listing of "low" intelligence because they have excellent retention of information, and learn to cope with their environment and neighbors quickly.

Due to the nature of the hook horror's language (only a hook horror can clack; a human's speech originates from his vocal cords), conventional translation spells such as *tongues* and *comprehend languages* will not decipher a hook horror's dialect. The best way to achieve a rudimentary understanding of the hook horror's language is to observe the creature over a long period of time (i.e., PCs won't be able to figure it out). The loudness of a hook horror's clacking is roughly the same as that of a man speaking normally.

Appendix

The hook horror's primary mode of attack is a set of two swordlike talons. Located at the ends of its 4′-long arms, these 1′-long hooks (equal to short swords, backed by 18 strength) are the creature's normal and preferred weapons. The hook horror may also utilize its sharp beak as a secondary weapon, but beak damage is weak, equaling a single claw attack -2 hp (1 hp damage minimum) and with a -2 to hit. A hook horror usually avoids biting, as a damaged beak means the creature's eventual death, as it cannot then eat.

The hook horror is a very sluggish creature by nature and too uncoordinated to successfully direct attacks against three separate opponents. It may try to attack two separate opponents, but it then has a -2 "to hit" penalty on its claws and -4 to hit with its beak. As a result, a double attack is only performed under the most desperate of situations.

If the hook horror is unable to use its claws (occurring only if its arms are broken or severed), it flees combat, biting with its beak in desperation. If only one arm is out of commission, the hook horror may attack with both its beak and free claw with only a -1 "to hit" penalty on the beak. Ω

by Mark Feil

The Ecology of the Aurumvorax

Count your fingers after you pet it

I was enjoying an evening drink in the Red Lion, one of my favorite taverns in Goodway during the time I was indentured to Duke Radford, and was getting ready to let fly with the story of how I once wooed six maids at the same time when, much to the pretended relief of my companions, I noticed a dwarf at my elbow. His sword was drawn but lowered. I tried to ignore him, but he would have none of that; he was determined to interrupt me.

"Are you Faulkenson the mage?" he growled, as he thrust his face close to mine. He looked like he had just crawled from the gutter. His breath certainly smelled like it.

"Yes, I am," I said, as I moved my chair back a foot for fresh air. "And who are you and what do you want?"

"I have authorization to take you immediately to Duke Kaor. Come with me."

"Duke Kaor? What does he want?" I was bewildered. Kaor the Toad was a rival of my master; his territory lay adjacent to Goodway. How did he know of me? Maybe I *had,* on occasion, let fly with a tall tale about my adventures, but it was usually only to the group of close friends now at the table. I likewise doubted the Duke wanted me to perform a service; he employed much more powerful spellcasters than myself.

The dwarf looked at me blackly. "He only wishes to talk to you and has promised me gold should I find you. His reasons are his own. Get up." Apparently, the little guy was having a bad day.

I looked at him straight on — easy enough while sitting down. "I'm really sorry, but I can't go with you. You see, I was just about to enlighten these—" I looked around the table and dismissed the word gentlemen "—these companions of mine with the story of the time I met half a dozen rich, beautiful, young maidens and what became-"

My beloved companions had obviously had too much to drink and were in a particularly mischievous mood that evening, as they carried me to the dwarf's horse and tied me over its back. It must have been the drink. They usually couldn't get enough of me.

A few bumpy hours later, I stood before Duke Kaor. The dwarf had been paid off, and the Duke evidently thought me valuable enough to entrust me with four of his largest guards. We were now in the Duke's library. Around me were volumes on shelves that covered all walls except for that behind the Duke's chair of state. Golden statuettes and unusual devices of magic lay on the shelves and floor, almost hidden in the semidarkness. Moonlight filtered through the large panes of glass behind Kaor; it was now late indeed. Despite the candles on some of the shelves, Kaor's bloated face was silhouetted and obscured.

"What do you know about the aurumvorax?" he asked without preamble.

"What do you mean, sir?" I was more nervous than I had anticipated. The line of questioning caught me off guard, and I was recalling some unpleasant stories about The Toad as well.

"Don't play games with me, Fautkenson," he ordered. "I know that one aurumvorax was apparently quite fond of you while you were training at the Academy. From what I have heard about aurumvoraxes, I didn't think they were fond of anything. What do you know?"

I hadn't thought that word of Goldie had gotten beyond the few friends I had sworn to secrecy a few years ago. I decided to lay out the basic facts and hope he would be satisfied with them while I tried to figure out what he was after.

"Well," I recited, "the aurumvorax is a small, shaggy, eight-legged animal usually found around lightly forested hills, though it may be encountered near the timberline of some mountains. Its golden fur is usually long and well cleaned. As you may know, sir, it weighs over 500 pounds in adulthood and fears nothing; the little monster can be extremely vicious and will attack anything that looks edible or threatening." *Much the way you do,* I thought.

Kaor looked unimpressed. "Tell me," he said slowly, "about your pet."

"Ah. My pet. Well, we had one at the Academy that had been captured while it was just about to come full term. It gave birth to six hairless kittens that we separated from the mother. After two weeks, their eyes opened and one took a liking to me. Her fur came out in a golden brown." I was getting nostalgic. "I remember she couldn't seem to get enough to eat, but she and the others took sick. Everything we tried to feed them came back up again."

"Go on," said the Duke. He sounded bored — but his stare was making me more nervous.

"Well, one day I was wearing a gold bracelet that a girlfriend had given me. I picked the kitten up to stroke her, and her nose went straight to the bracelet. She started to chew on it. I thought it harmless enough until I noticed that Goldie was actually chewing the chain to pieces with her little teeth and swallowing the fragments. Before I could get it away from her, she had eaten the whole thing."

Kaor looked less bored now, but continued to stare.

"Goldie perked up immediately afterward and had her health back within a few days. The roots of her hair began to take on a metallic-gold glint. That's when I named her Goldie. I reported this to my mentor, and he suggested that we isolate one kitten on an all-meat diet, give mine meat supplemented with gold, and give the rest of the litter other precious metals with their meals. The kitten with a plain diet died a week later, as did the others, although the one fed platinum lived about three weeks. Goldie grew rapidly, putting on weight until she was too heavy to carry after a month. She retained all the gold

she ate. She gnawed the bars of her cage and any other metal that she could find. Copper pots were a favorite; her teeth and claws absorbed the metal from those.

"By the time she was two months old, I had read everything I could find about aurumvoraxes. I was the local authority on them at the Academy." I puffed out my chest a little. The Duke seemed to be eating it up. Maybe he wouldn't do anything rash to me. "I talked to every ranger and druid who claimed to have seen aurumvoraxes, and pieced together that they are solitary creatures, each defending a territory about 10 miles square. Every eight or nine years, they seek a mate, spend a week together, then return to their respective territories. Sometime between three and four months later, the female gives birth to about half a dozen kittens. She weans them after about five or six years, when they're halfway grown, and forces them to stake out their own territories."

The Duke raised a pudgy hand. "How long did it take yours to reach that point? Was it that long?"

"No," I told him. "Goldie was nearly grown, that's about a yard long and a foot high at the back, in less than a year." I could tell he was ready to ask the obvious question and I beat him to it. "I believe it was because we fed her a diet rich in gold. Any aurumvoraxes in the wild must pick up the gold they need to survive by eating jewelry from unlucky travelers or by actually digging up gold ore itself. The aurumvorax is a burrowing animal with eight sets of claws; no digging task is impossible for it."

The Duke rubbed his chins. "But can there actually be that much gold out there — I mean, in the hills where gold has never been found, but where an aurumvorax is known to live?"

I spread my palms, my confidence back. "Well, where there's an aurumvorax, there *must* be gold. It cannot be otherwise. But the gold will eventually be exhausted, and little will be found in the creature's lair. Dwarves and gnomes are not fond of these beasts, as you might well imagine."

The Duke seemed to consider this for a moment. "What happened to your animal? My sources tell me it was very loyal to you, and eventually you were the only one who could feed it."

My throat went dry for a moment. I dropped my gaze, then words came easily again. "Yes, sir," I said. "She would even let me stroke her, though I had to wear gauntlets in case she was in a playful mood. She could bite my hand off without meaning to do it. But she was gentle. . ." I hesitated. "I'm afraid she died from poisoning, my lord. She got into a laboratory and chewed on some metal flasks. There was nothing we could do."

"Ah." The Duke sighed, his eyes focusing on the floor in deep thought. "Oh, well."

"If I may, sir," I said after a pause, "why do you have an interest in aurumvoraxes?" Couldn't hurt to ask — I hoped.

Duke Kaor looked up. The candlelight showed he had a faint, fat grin. "As you may or may not be aware, in two months time I am going to the royal court in celebration of 30 years of service to His Majesty. I have been personally invited, and His Highness intends to reward me for my loyalty and devotion. I thought it would be fitting to arrive wearing an aurumvorax cape. For the ego, you know."

I was horrified but didn't show it. Granted that the aurumvorax wasn't an animal you would usually call lovable, but . . . "Where does your lordship mean to find an aurumvorax?" I asked.

He stared at me, then shrugged. "I have been made aware of the existence of one of these creatures near my northern borders. I will personally lead an expedition to dispatch the beast in two weeks, and we will have the cape by the time I leave for the royal audience. Thank you for your time, Faulkenson. My men will show you the way out. Ah — one detail. I'm sure you can appreciate the contents of this room; thus, you may take any item you can spot in the candlelight as your reward." He rose from the chair, and his huge stomach jiggled as he walked toward a side door — probably to the larder. A burly guard reached for my arm.

"Your pardon, gracious sir," I asked hastily, "but how do you intend to kill your aurumvorax?"

He turned and smiled in the dim light. "With poisoned arrows. Why, Faulkenson, you gave me the idea yourself."

I made a half-bow. "Sir, may I recommend leaving out gold with a coating of poison, then attacking the beast with clubs after it has finished its meal? An aurumvorax's fur is woven so that it resists the penetration of sharp objects, but blunt weapons easily crush its internal organs — and poisons, as I have learned to my sorrow, work swiftly on them."

Kaor the Toad looked astonished, then simply roared and shook with laughter. "Yes! My young man, that's an excellent idea! Superb! A plan worthy of a true mage." He looked around the dim room. "You may take two of whatever you wish." He left through the door, still chuckling.

"Thank you, good sir," I said as the door closed. I had spotted my payment the instant I had walked into the room. Moving behind the Duke's chair, I grasped the pair of objects that rested on the windowsill and placed them awkwardly beneath my cloak. A few minutes later, the guards showed me to a horse the Duke had set aside so I could return to Goodway. I kept up my look of awe and gratitude until I was safely away.

Then I spat to the side as I rode and smiled. "Good hunting, indeed," I whispered, and turned the horse northward.

Years ago, one of my instructors at the Academy had taken a dislike to Goldie and had tried to poison her. He was convinced that poison was the only way to kill her and escape detection; after all, who would

suspect a wizard of not using magic? He was caught, but the poisoning didn't stop; my mentor ordered it continued when he noticed that Goldie was immune to all forms of poison. Nothing slowed her down. Apparently the same internal chemistry that allowed her to use gold also made her immune to any normal toxin.

The Duke would also be in for a surprise when he went to kill that aurumvorax with a club at close quarters. Aurumvoraxes are so dense from the gold they eat that blunt weapons are of little use against them. Using the arrows, with or without poison, would have been a far better idea. A clubbing would only enrage the little beast — and the Duke would have to beg the mercy of the gods to save himself from the monster's fury. The Nine Hells have nothing like them. An old ranger told of an aurumvorax that had chased a manticore and several wyverns from the hills it had adopted as its home. Another told me of an adolescent green dragon that tried to deprive an aurumvorax of a cave and lost its life.

Was I justified in lying to the Duke, leading him to his death? Aye, the Duke was not the most wicked of men, but his greed was legendary, and you were wise to count your fingers after you dealt with him. When the mood took him, he could be generous, as he had been tonight. He could also have had me slain. He might still.

As the horse's hooves thundered toward the northern reaches of Kaor's territory, I pulled my two rewards closer beneath my cloak. I would be leaving the area with Duke Radford on the morrow, and wouldn't be back for two months, when my Duke would himself be honored by His Highness for his own service. By then—

The two massive candlesticks beneath my cloak were made from 15 pounds of pure, solid gold each. I laughed. Goldie was going to love them.

Other notes

The aurumvorax sometimes lives near the bottom of a shallow ravine, but usually chooses to dig a burrow or den in the side of a lightly wooded hill. It has eight legs, and is covered with golden fur about 3" long. Measuring 3' long and about 1½' high, the animal has copper-colored teeth and claws, the latter up to 3" long. Its whiskers and parts of its mane are bronze in color, and its eyes are pools of silver with golden pupils. The aurumvorax's flesh is extremely dense due to the intake and retention of gold, which accounts for its partial immunity to attacks by blunt weapons and its incredible weight. Other metals are absorbed into its system as well, but in lesser amounts.

A unique biochemistry grants the aurumvorax a high tolerance to heat and a total immunity to all poisons and gases. They are undamaged by small, normal fires, and magical fires cause only half damage. Likewise, they are surprisingly fast, strong, and tough, being able to drag their own weight in prey. The jaw muscles of the aurumvorax, being especially strong, are used to clamp on to a victim, and only death will loosen the grip.

An aurumvorax typically defends its territory from all other comers, tolerating most other animals but wary of large predators and humans. Almost any animal, however, may be considered prey if it wanders within range. The lair itself often extends deep into solid rock, which can support the beast's incredible weight. Rock rich in gold ore is nearly always used as a lair, though other locations may be chosen so long as gold deposits, either natural or from a civilized area, are available.

Mating occurs roughly every eight years, resulting in a litter of 5-8 kittens, most of which die young because of the rarity of gold. Adults are sometimes forced to eat one or more of their young if gold-based nourishment is not available. Usually, only one or two kittens survive to adulthood. During the first year of life for the kittens, the mother will be bad tempered, attacking anything within sight that might represent a threat to her young. If a PC obtains a kitten before its eyes open, he may attempt to befriend it, the probability of which increases with the amount of food and gold given to the kitten. Without gold in the first three weeks of life, the kitten dies. Kittens can detect any form of gold instinctively and seek it out in addition to red meat. If raised as a pet and supplied with ample amounts of gold, food, and attention, kittens grow rapidly. Typically, an aurumvorax reaches full size in about seven years in the wild, but the time may be only a year in captivity with ideal conditions. Kittens raised in captivity grow into strong, fiercely loyal pets if conditions are ideal.

If killed and eaten, the flesh of the aurumvorax produces severe metal poisoning. The eater must save vs. poison 1d4 turns after the meat is eaten; a successful save means severe nausea and cramps strike the victim (as per a *symbol of pain),* lasting 2-8 hours. Failure to save indicates the victim goes into a coma and dies 10-60 rounds later. Only another aurumvorax may feast on one of its kind. If, on the other hand, the whole animal is roasted and the remains heated until everything burns off, 151-250 lbs. of gold and traces of other metals remain, depending on the size of the aurumvorax. In addition, if the pelt is carefully removed and tanned to preserve not only the hide but the gold-colored, metallic hair (the whole process typically costing 4,000-5,000 gp for the special procedure and materials), a durable but heavy garment may be made that has a value in excess of 15,000 gp. Ω

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by David Howery

The Ecology of the Carnivorous Ape

Illustration by Jim Holloway

The lords of the savage jungle

Excerpt from "Beasts of the Far Southlands," by the sage Fabius:

There are many types of apes in the tropical lands, but the carnivorous ape is the most notorious and legendary. Many fables are told of this primate's ferocity and lust for human flesh. The truth is less fantastic, of course; the carnivorous ape lives in remote areas and has rarely been studied. At one time, it was thought that apes were all vegetarian and that the carnivorous ape was an anomaly. Now it is known that all apes will eat meat to varying degrees, just as bears do. The carnivorous ape is simply a carnivorous member of an otherwise omnivorous family.

It was my good fortune to have made friendship with a clan of Watanga tribesmen. These so-called savages live on the fringes of the southern Hepmonaland jungle, and my temporary residence there gave me an excellent opportunity to study a family group of carnivorous apes that roamed the nearby wilderness. The results of these two years of research are given here.

Description

As is well known, carnivorous apes have a superficial resemblance to gorillas. They are tall, broad, heavily built, and covered with long, black hair. Albino carnivorous apes are occasionally seen. Male apes stand up to 7′ tall and weigh up to 625 lbs. Females are somewhat smaller, averaging 6′ and 500 lbs.[1]

It is the physiology of the jaws that shows the greatest distinction between carnivorous apes and gorillas. The mouth of the carnivorous ape is a bit longer and drawn out than in gorillas, almost becoming a muzzle. The teeth are long and sharp, with pointed incisors and canines designed to cut and tear flesh. The ape is a gluttonous eater, tearing off and swallowing chunks of flesh with every bite.

This ape has very keen senses, as befits a carnivore. The senses of sight and smell

are comparable to those of the great cats. The ape's hearing is also keen, making it hard to approach a group of these beasts undetected.

The arms and legs of the carnivorous ape are longer though nearly identical to those of the gorilla. Surprisingly, this ape has bony nails which curve into the form of claws; this is unusual in a primate.

Like all apes, the carnivorous ape is incredibly strong. An adult male is capable of dragging a buffalo carcass for miles into the jungle. One ape was seen rolling an elephant's carcass over in an attempt to get it closer to a group of protective trees. Carnivorous apes can thus easily carry off a man, if they choose to do so.

Life and habits

Female carnivorous apes give birth to single young (rarely two) once every five or six years. The young are fully dependent on their mothers for three years. During this time, they cling to the hair on their mothers' backs, only rarely moving away from them. At the age of four to seven years, the young gradually learn to move around in trees and hunt, gaining full independence at age eight. Full maturity comes at the tenth year.

As far as is known, carnivorous apes may live up to 40 years of age. The elderly are easy to pick out; as the apes get past 30 years of age, their hair gradually turns gray at the tips. The oldest individuals have a dark silvery coat, and with practice an observer may note distinctive facial and bodily characteristics of individual apes.

The life habits of the carnivorous apes are an odd mixture of those of the leopard, lion, gorilla, and bear. This is a result of their size, diet, and intelligence. Like other apes, the carnivorous ape lives in small family groups, usually numbering around eight adults but sometimes reaching numbers as high as 20. Within these groups, there is about a two-to-one ratio of females to males. The leader of the group is the largest male. The leader is often challenged by young males in nonlethal wrestling matches; defeated challengers are driven off and usually (but not always) join another family group. Defeated leaders leave the group and live a solitary existence for the rest of their lives, becoming a particular danger to humans dwelling nearby.

Within the family groups, the males are dominant. They get the choice parts of killed game and the best sleeping areas. When a kill is brought in, the males eat their fill first, followed by the females; the young are last to feed. In times of scarcity, many of the young starve to death.

Carnivorous apes do not establish actual lairs, but family groups do have large territories over which they widely roam. The size of the territory is about one to three square miles per adult in the group. The male apes mark their territorial boundaries by scarring tree trunks with their nails, and also by releasing a musky scent from glands in their cheeks (carnivorous apes releasing this scent appear to be hissing with open mouths at trees or objects they are marking).

Since carnivorous apes are not vegetarians, they do not live in the depths of the jungle where little game is found. These apes roam areas where the jungle is broken by hills or by the edge of the savannah, where much more game is found than deep in the rain forest.[2]

The diet of the carnivorous ape is varied. The apes will take almost any kind of meat they can get. Rodents make up nearly one-third of their diet. Another third is made of things like carrion, snakes, tortoises, eggs, lizards, fish, and the larvae of giant insects. Thus, two-thirds of the carnivorous ape's diet comes from individual foraging. The apes depend greatly on such foraging because of their size, which makes it necessary to have a large intake of high-protein food.

The remainder of these apes' diet comes from killed game. In this respect, the carnivorous apes are like lions; they drag the kill back to the group so all may eat. The apes may hunt either in groups or singly. Whenever a herd of large game such as buffalo or wildebeest wanders close to the apes' territory, all adult apes join the hunt, except for nursing mothers. More often, the only game available consists of antelope and warthogs. One group of apes was seen attacking a giraffe, although the intended prey viciously kicked several of the hunters and was able to run away.

Carnivorous apes do not wander very far from their protective trees, due to their fear of lions. Although one ape is a match for one lion, the apes generally act to protect the weaker members of their family groups. Leopards do not seem to be a major competitor, even though the leopards and apes are both tree climbers. Where they coexist, the leopards usually take the smaller, faster prey that the apes can't catch. However, it should be noted that carnivorous apes are capable of short bursts of speed and can easily outdistance a running man.[3]

When hunting alone, the apes depend on stealth. They often hide in trees overlooking trails or water, then leap out at creatures passing by.[4] At other times, the apes hide in grass or bushes, dashing out at their prey in hopes of catching it by surprise. Whatever method is used, the prey is doomed once the ape's great strength and sharp teeth come into play. Rending and breaking limbs is an often-seen tactic when a carnivorous ape means to incapacitate a foe.

Carnivorous apes and men

The carnivorous ape has a reputation for man-eating. While this is true to some extent, by no means do they all eat men. The apes can be compared to tigers in that individuals will occasionally turn into man-eaters, while the majority do not. Most of the man-eaters are solitary apes who were injured in some way, so as not to be able to catch other prey; such apes are usually defeated leaders cast out of their tribe.

Occasionally, however, an entire family group will turn into man-eaters. These groups are greatly feared by the native tribes. The apes' cunning allows them to make devastating raids on villages and caravans. Palisade walls are no protection against climbing apes. One group of 18 carnivorous apes attacked a slaver camp at night, silently climbing the walls. Once inside the camp, the apes tore apart huts and smashed tents flat. Out of 32 slavers, 28 were killed, along with 50 manacled slaves. The other six slavers saved themselves only by fleeing headlong into the jungle, somehow escaping undetected.

Although carnivorous apes may hunt men, men may also hunt the apes. Unscrupulous natives search out small family groups, spear the adults, and capture the young. The young are sold to similarly unscrupulous traders. This is how carnivorous apes end up in places far from their native jungle, such as hobgoblin lairs and hill-giant clans. Carnivorous apes appear to be more adaptable than their gorilla cousins, and they may even thrive in foreign, temperate areas where old forests are found.

Even stranger are the natives who worship carnivorous apes. One tribe believes that killing a carnivorous ape brings great luck and courage to the slayer; thus, one of their rites of manhood is to kill a carnivorous ape. Another tribe is known to regard the apes as sacred. This latter tribe keeps carnivorous apes as pets and feeds captives to them; such apes wander the tribal village freely and are said to be well behaved and friendly — to the villagers only, of course.

In summary, it should be seen that carnivorous apes are merely another jungle predator, instead of the bloodthirsty man-eaters of legend. However, their size and intelligence make them creatures to be wary of. Wandering through their territories is a perilous undertaking, for a single male ape is the equal of a half-dozen men-at-arms.

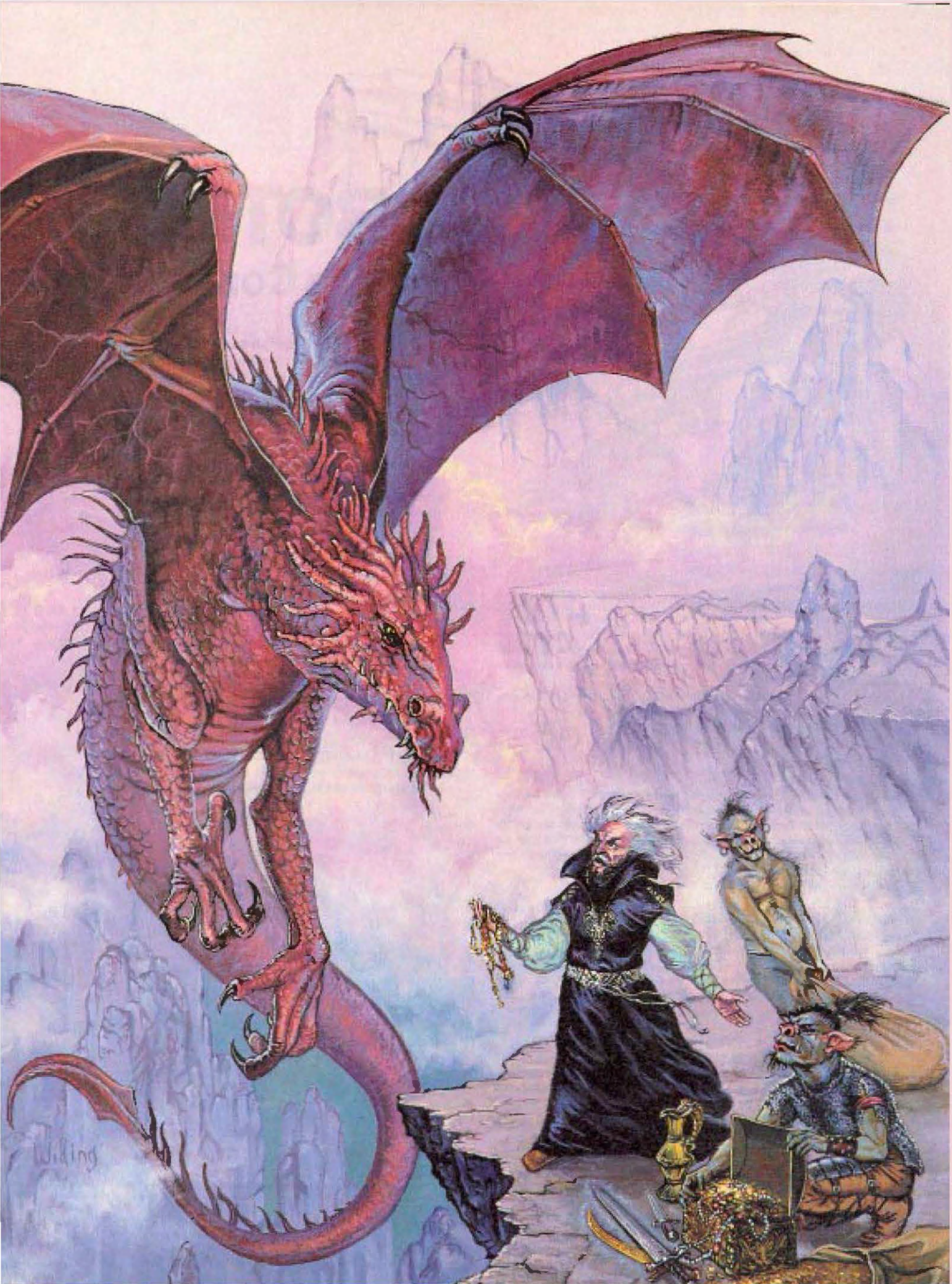
Notes

1. Treat female carnivorous apes as gorillas for hit dice and attacks, but allow them the same keen senses as the males.

2. Carnivorous apes can move through trees (brachiation) at a rate of 10". They can also run an 18" sprint, but only for one round. This sprint is used when the ape leaps out of an ambush; if attacking in the same round as it sprints, the ape's attacks are at +2 to hit for that round, but its armor class drops from AC 6 to AC 7.

3. When hiding in ambush (in grass or up in trees), the carnivorous ape has a 50% chance of surprising its prey.

4. When the ape hides in a tree and leaps down on its prey, the prey (if hit) takes 2-8 hp damage from the impact. Ω


Wilding

by Gregg Sharp

The Ecology of the Red Dragon

The color of blood and fire

The slender, middle-aged man considered the question for a moment, then pulled a map from a drawer and unfolded it on top of his desk. Placing bric-a-brac on the corners, he glanced from it to the young men who faced him in his study.

"You're sure that you want to hunt down a dragon?" he asked quietly. "Isn't there something smaller and less offensive you could go after, then work your way up?" He jabbed a finger down at a wooded area on the map. "Now, here is reputed to be the lair of a wondrous sort of being known as a cyclopskin. Much less impressive than a dragon, to be sure, but not as deadly. This cyclopskin—"

The brawny youth who seemed to be the leader placed a hand on his sword. "You calling me a coward, Nimodes?" he asked.

The sage hesitated and sighed, but he never looked up. He adjusted his spectacles. "Well, if it must be a dragon. . ." He bent over the map. "Now, there are three dragons known to have lairs within two months' march of here. . ."

A gangling youth moaned. "Two months! Haven't you got anything closer?"

"Sorry," Nimodes said, though truly he didn't sound sorry. "You take a dragon where it lies. Dragons are so voracious that they cover wide areas for their hunting grounds. When you're dealing with the big dragons, this range encompasses entire kingdoms as their own territories, so they never run out of food or loot. A wizard I know who lectures on the ecologies of various monsters says that dragons have no ecology: They ravage it. Now, if you want to meet some great wizard and have him bring a dragon to you, I can arrange for that. I'm merely a hedge wizard and a scholar, but I have some friends who could do this. Of course, it will cost you much. . . ."

After a short silence, the sage coughed and pointed to the map, to a range of mountains surrounded by forest. "Here is the nearest true dragon, in an ice cave atop the highest summit around. His human name is Frostbite, a friend to elf and dwarf. He is huge and of the silver breed. He hoards only knowledge, and this is the treasure that most seek from him."

"I think that one would not be worth the trouble." The brawny leader said casually. He had lost interest after hearing the words "hoards only knowledge." The sage noted this and dropped his gaze back to the map. It was as he'd expected.

"The second dragon is probably not worth it, either;' he said, "as she is employed by the City-State of Helsford as a guardian, and even has a rank in the army there. She is Frostbite's daughter. Here, then. Look over on the other end of this range, where another sort of dragon makes his lair. Pyre is his name, a red dragon. If I recall the passage correctly, *The Lorebook of Aramar* writes of him:

> "Red blood his color and delight,
> Red flame his breath that burns the night,
> Long scimitars he has for claws,
> A fang-ringed cavern 'twixt his jaws,
> Red armored is this deadly Pyre,
> Who stole our gold to stoke his fire;
> A hundred men sought out his lair —
> Not one did Pyre the dragon spare."

At the mention of gold, the youths smiled and nudged one another. They didn't seem at all bothered by the last two lines — except, noted Nimodes, for one youth in the rear, who had an intense, bookish look about him. The sage briefly wondered if the youths had some powerful talisman or magical weapon that gave them such confidence. He immediately rejected the idea. They had nothing but youth and enthusiasm — and a fatal naivete. Nimodes vaguely recognized most of them as being of farming families. Nothing wrong with that, but challenging a red dragon wasn't in their league. Damn those lying adventurers, he thought, who had passed through the region last month. Loose talk about mounds of gold and easy victories had obviously borne results that he should have foreseen. These boys were going to die.

The brawny youth grinned widely. "Pyre. That sounds like the dragon for us. What can you tell us of it?"

"Him. A point in your favor." A worthless one, Nimodes added mentally. "Of the red dragons, it is the female which is the most dangerous, for she is less likely to bargain or surrender under duress.' This does not mean that males are weak. The city that sent the small army after the gold was burned to the ground shortly thereafter. Only a handful of the residents survived the firestorm. That was two hundred years ago; since dragons grow throughout their lifespans, Pyre is all the mightier now — though perhaps weaker, too, as he is at least six centuries old.[2] He may be even older."

Much of the grinning ceased, but the youths did their best to look only mildly concerned at the news. The one youth in the rear who seemed to have doubts before now appeared concerned but very thoughtful. For some reason, Nimodes was pleased to see it.

"Oh, to be sure," Nimodes said smoothly, "the red dragon has its weaknesses. Pyre is old and getting to be slow, despite his incredible power. Sadly, his age has not diminished his might once he brings it to bear. He may yet have other vulnerabilities peculiar to him, if legends are to be believed."

"What sort of vulnerabilities?" It was the

Illustration by Ken Widing

youth in the back of the group. Nimodes noted from the boy's clothing that he was probably from one of the towns near the Greenwitch River. The sage smiled. He had hated to think that the brawny lad was the brains of the group. Maybe the boys had a chance of surviving an encounter with Pyre, if not being talked out of it altogether in time. He certainly had no hope that they'd defeat the monster itself.

"Dragons, particularly the older ones, sleep a great deal — rather like house cats, I suppose." Nimodes sat back, looking past the group as he thought. "It is during sleep that older dragons are especially vulnerable, but only if their senses are on the wane. Their sleep is very deep, and they dream a tremendous amount, but dragons rarely speak of their dreams. Some say that dragons do not dream so much as they remember in full detail earlier experiences in their lives, rather like elves. Some texts say that they experience past lives in these slumbers, which accounts for a slight disorientation when they awaken." A dragon may sleep for extremely long periods of time, even hundreds of days. Sadly, awakening from such a long sleep leaves a dragon in a great hunger. When it awakens, it yearns to lay waste to its surroundings."

"You said something about vulnerabilities that were Pyre's alone," reminded the youth in the back.

Nimodes blinked. "Hmm. Yes. Well, during Pyre's attack upon Valesburgh two hundred years past, he was said to have lost an eye to a machine-hurled bolt. A survivor of the battle saw the dragon bleeding from his head, roaring as he clutched his right eye with a foreclaw. Pyre is now many hundreds of years old, and even a dragon's senses won't improve forever. He might be blind now."

The youths grinned at the news. "Another weakness of the red dragon is its greed," Nimodes continued. "A red dragon seeks gold above all other things in life, for gold gives it status among other red dragons. The male red dragon's second great love is to eat, the third is to sleep.' But a love of gold will drive a male red dragon to any lengths. That focus has been used to their disadvantage in traps and trickery against them on a few occasions, though a vengeful red dragon is the worst of enemies. It is best to kill them swiftly rather than to tease or bargain with them; they are too dangerous."

The scholarly looking youth spoke up again. "I have heard that some dragons somehow resist spells."

Nimodes instantly placed the boy. Rumor said a river-town wizard had recently turned his apprentice loose. "True enough. Some are indeed able to throw off spells, but they cannot negate the existence of magic itself. They are merely tougher than we are, and they are partly magical in nature. Speaking of which, you should know that some dragons have gained from their parents knowledge of spell-casting. Dragons that were abandoned at birth cannot even speak, much less cast spells, but they are rare ones in these lands. Pyre is the hatchling of Infernalle, a female dragon who would not accept that any offspring of hers would be anything less than a menace to civilization. It is known that Pyre favors fire-based spells — ah, I had forgotten to say, yes, Pyre is a spell-caster, and he was very good at it, too. I cannot say how good he is at present; he has not been seen in some time. Pyre is said in legend to rejoice in the casting of fiery spells, always in the service of destruction."

"Magic is of little consequence to cold steel," sneered the brawny youth as he drew his blade to brandish it. Nimodes noticed that he held his blade in the manner of a club. A few rust splotches marred the steel, and there were notches along its length. Not a magical sword, though one that had seen quite a bit of use in its long-ago day. Nimodes resolved to talk to the apprentice later, privately if possible; it was a shame to throw away talent.

"Pyre uses magic, yes, and he breathes a cone of flame. His senses are exceptionally acute. Should he taste your blood, he can track you by scent to the ends of the world.[5] His bite is powerful, his claws can hold a target fast, and his cone of fire can cleanse all remains away. Pyre is quite capable of melting away even . . . ah, nevermind. I know — fire is of little consequence to cold steel." Nimodes wished he could smile, but it was too painful.

The apprentice spoke up again. "Do your books mention any of Pyre's habits or traits that could be exploited?" At a bored look from the leader, he added, "No point in spending more time than we have to."

Nimodes nodded, pleased. "All red dragons share certain traits with the common house cat. They play with their food, like to sleep near a heat source, bury their wastes, and hate getting wet. Pyre, as with some of his kind, likes to talk with his food, meaning those who are unfortunate enough to be captured by him. One text of mine claims that Pyre is fond of riddles and jokes. To win a riddling contest with Pyre, he must be unable to guess the answer of one of yours while you must answer all three of his. It is unlikely, should Pyre gain the upper hand, that all his prisoners would escape. Perhaps one in ten could bargain his way out. Indeed, Pyre has a unique single trait which irritates others of his own kind: a fondness for puns. The worse the pun, the better Pyre likes it. A jester named Fered the Moor once managed to get three adventurers out with a single pun. Of course, Fered was legendary among jesters across this whole-"

"This is getting boring," interrupted the brawny youth. "We don't plan to let the dragon get the upper hand. Since you've been paid for information, make it useful. Where can we strike the most telling damage?"

The sage looked up into the leader's eyes, stared hard at him, then turned away. "As you wish. If you have the chance and can strike there, hit the eyes. A direct hit upon the eyes will cause any dragon to draw back. If the blow doesn't go deep, the dragon will go berserk and scour the area with flames and claw. It is told that the red dragon Firetongue was struck so, and only one returned to tell the tale. That one escaped when the enraged dragon brought the cavern down on her attackers and herself. Any dragon fears the loss of its senses. Blindness is the worst fate that a dragon could imagine, worse even than the loss of its wings and limbs. A blind dragon is at the mercy of all other creatures, vulnerable when it was once all-powerful; it cannot bear it."

"As for exploitable fears, Pyre has none that anyone knows about. Perhaps he has only the one common to all dragons — fear for his own life. Dragons are cowards at heart . . . but you must be very strong to bring this fear out." I musn't encourage them, Nimodes thought. "Fear, however, will certainly be your problem."

"And why is that, mighty wizard?" sneered the leader.

Nimodes just looked back, refusing to be baited. "Most dragons project fear itself as an effect of having a magical metabolism. This is the dragonaura, a literal cloud of terror which surrounds the dragon when it wants to show itself in its glory. Some with special training, such as knights and paladins, can throw off this effect, and certain magical protections can also negate this terror-cloud.

"Yet even the dragonaura is pathetic compared to the most valuable and critical trait of dragons like Pyre — their cleverness, pure and simple. Pyre has lived a long and full life, and has learned every trick in the book. His lair will be filled with traps and perils, ready to be unleashed at a moment's notice.' A red dragon on the southern coast once located casks of alcohol so that they could be shattered with a swipe of his tail, sending alcohol down onto his cavern floor. One breath would have ignited the whole cavern in a fiery blast that would not have harmed the dragon greatly. He was a clever dragon."

"What happened to him?" asked the youth in the back.

Nimodes smiled and glanced at something on his wall. "Oh, the dragon ran into adventurers more clever than he."

The apprentice cleared his throat. "What can you tell us about what a red dragon eats and drinks?"

"Nothing that can be poisoned in a way that will affect the dragon, except perhaps in centuries. The red eats what it can catch and kill." As for drink, alcohol is its preference, though it will never become drunk. Water is taken in small doses, as living prey is moist enough for its needs. A dragon need not eat or drink during the time its sleeps, regardless of the time

involved, and it suffers little even from a loss of fresh air while asleep. One red dragon was buried by a rock and mud slide while asleep, only to awaken and dig its way out later in the year. When it does eat, the red dragon can consume twice its body weight before dragging itself off to digest the meal."

"And where will its greatest treasures be?" asked the brawny youth loudly, not liking to be left out of the conversation.

"Now, that depends on what you mean by treasures," said the sage. "Coins, of course, make up a red dragon's bed. Gems and other precious materials will be placed around its lair in highly visible locations, pleasing to the eye. Unlike the silver, the red dragon collects little art. Unlike the gold, it rarely shows a preference for gems, which the gold dragon eats. Unlike the vain brass, the red does not usually surround itself with reflective surfaces. Items used only by men, such as magical armor, are often placed at the back of the lair, to draw attackers in with their own greed. Knowing greed as well as a dragon does, it is no wonder it can use the same to trap its prey.

"Magical items are separated from their owners before the latter are devoured, and these items will most likely be in a side cave. These are trophies of the kill, and they are watched over and counted almost continuously. With red dragons, one faces the possibility that a hollow has been dug into the rock, the treasures placed within, and other rocks forced into place with the dragon's massive strength."

Nimodes sighed. "And that is all I know to tell you. If you have more money, I could research the topic in the library at the Castle Mardelaine, where-"

The leader cut him off. "That's enough, old man," he said with a wave of his hand. "We have what we need. Good day." He turned and forced his way through the group of youths around him, and they followed after him, muttering strategies among themselves. Nimodes watched them go, wondering if he should stop them. They were fools who had as much chance of killing Pyre with those swords and farm implements as they would with snowballs. He thought, then slowly released his grip on the arms of his chair. No, they would never listen. So be it. It was a waste.

Then he noticed the apprentice, who had stayed behind. The boy was staring at the object on the wall at which Nimodes had glanced earlier. "A trophy of sorts?" said the youth with interest.

A jagged yellow tooth was in a bottle on the shelf. A full five hands long, it came to a sharp carnivore's point. Nimodes looked at it and smiled faintly. "A relic of my adventuresome youth."

The apprentice laughed then. "Perhaps I'll bring you another — not now, but in time. I sense that I should study this adventure before us a while longer before we set out. If the others leave without me –well . . ." The boy sighed and shrugged. "I wish them well, and they will be missed. But I want to do this right the first time. Good day, Nimodes, and my thanks."

Staring at the closed door a moment later, Nimodes was lost in thought. He had a feeling he would indeed see the apprentice again. He knew it in his bones.

Footnotes

1. Female red dragons, at the DM's option, may be harder to subdue than male ones. When attacking to subdue, take one and a half times the female dragon's hit-point total to calculate her effective hit-point value for subdual purposes. Thus, a 44-hp female red dragon effectively has 66 hp for purposes of subdual combat; if 33 hp subdual damage is inflicted on her, there is only a 50% chance that she will be subdued. Double her hit-point total for subdual purposes if the female red dragon is defending her young or eggs. Female red dragons will not listen to bribery, though flattery may impress them.

2. Like many dragons, red dragons shed their skins as they pass into each new life stage. Red dragons eat their old scaled skins, so as to gain certain nutrients from them. A very young red dragon is about 6′ long; between its fifth and sixth years, it grows to 12′, then gains another 12′ in length for every stage of life thereafter. Thus, an adult red dragon is 48′ long. The size differences of "small," "average," and "huge" refer to the dragon's body mass; a small dragon is thin and wirey, and a huge dragon is thick-bodied, muscular, or fat, with length remaining constant for all body types.

Red dragons of particularly advanced age (600 years old or more) suffer debilitating effects from their age. Their chances of sleeping increase by 10% per decade thereafter, with additional reductions of ½" per decade in the range of their ability to *detect hidden or invisible creatures,* and of 5′ per decade in the range of their infravision. Dragons that are 700 years old or more have a 95% chance to be found sleeping, and have infravision to a range of 10′; they cannot *detect hidden or invisible creatures* except within a range of 3". Their chances of death per decade after their 700th year are 5% per decade, cumulatively. Dragons that can cast spells suffer a 5% spell-failure penalty for every decade of age past their 600th year, to a 95% spell-failure maximum. For a few weeks prior to its death, a red dragon may become senile and insane, and is especially dangerous as it becomes so unpredictable.

3. Dragons of ancient age are disoriented when awakened from sleep. Allow a loss of initiative when appropriate for their response to an attack or confrontation if suddenly awakened. A dragon older than 600 years loses intiative for the round following its awakening and makes no attacks in the round it was awakened.

4. Female red dragons differ from males in their preferences. Females like to fight, first and foremost, and especially love to fight females of their own kind. They are even more territorial than males and less tolerant of other species. A male might be bribed to look the other way while a "morsel" escapes, while a female will take bribe and briber both. The female is also the aggressor in mating. It has happened that when young dragons leave their nest, the female becomes temporarily insane and slays the male. She then devours her former mate and any of the hatchlings which return. After fighting comes an interest in food, then in gold and treasures, the female liking reflective surfaces. Female red dragons have only a 15% chance to be caught sleeping.

5. A red dragon that has tasted someone's blood can track that person as can a ranger of a level equal to the dragon's age stage, using the information in *Unearthed Arcana,* page 21. Thus an adult red dragon has a 60% chance of tracking a wounded victim. Using smell, sight, and hearing alone, the dragon has one-half this chance of tracking someone that it has previously detected but not wounded.

6. Dragons value their sense of sight highly, even above their senses of smell and hearing. A blind dragon makes all attacks at -4 to hit and will retreat whenever possible from determined opposition.

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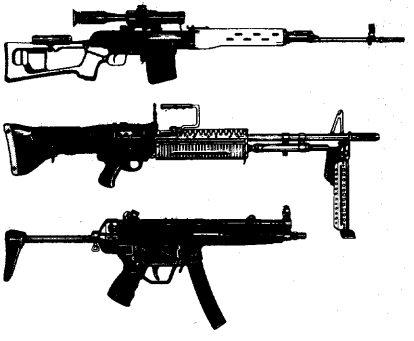

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If cornered, the dragon snaps at every sound and scent, but may be more than willing to bargain or plead for its life. Dragons without senses of smell or hearing are not affected in this manner. Dragons may be struck in their eyes only if attacked while sleeping. There is a 10% chance per level of the attacker that a blow aimed at a dragon's eyes will drive into the most sensitive part and not be turned aside by the tough eyelids (this chance rises to 20% per level of the attacker if he is a fighter or cavalier, or one of the subclasses thereof). At least 8 hp damage must be done to permanently blind the dragon in one eye; otherwise, the dragon is blinded for only 2-5 rounds, then has a -2 to hit for 5-10 days thereafter, then sees and fights normally.

7. Some dragons, notably the green, red, bronze, and white, swallow small stones and bits of metal which go into a small second stomach. This is similar to the gizzard of a bird, needed because these dragons are unable to chew food. These coins and other bric-a-brac aid digestion and are eventually left in waste products. Many dragon breeds, particularly the fastidious red, bury these wastes outside their lairs. Red dragon wastes, in addition to including small bits of metal, contain large amounts of sulfur and potassium nitrate. Thus, a sharp odor is a clue to the location of such a burial spot. To the surprise of many, the presence of sparks or fire, whether from a shovel striking a rock or from a dragon's fiery breath, causes these sites to suddenly explode with tremendous violence. Red dragons have used this physical property of their wastes as a secret weapon; they lure a group of attackers to either dig into a waste-pit or stand over it as the dragon breathes upon the ground. The explosion produced, as a rule of thumb, does half as many hit points of damage as the dragon's own normal hit points, or one-quarter of this amount if a saving throw vs. breath weapon is made. The radius of effect equals the dragon's hit points expressed in feet. Red dragons, given their tough hides and resistance to fire, take only one-quarter or one-eighth damage, depending on their saving throws if they are within the area of effect.

8. Since dragons are reluctant to discuss their dietary habits (beyond their threats to eat those who inquire into such matters), little information is available to PCs on this topic. Red dragons are, as everyone knows, carnivorous. Also, thanks to their magical metabolism, red dragons can go for prolonged periods without actually eating (this is how they can sleep for durations of 5-500 days). If awakened after a sleep lasting at least 30 days, a red dragon will do anything to get food before performing most other actions. Red dragons have a +4 bonus to their saving throws vs. poison and take only half damage from it (or lose half their normal hit-point maximum if a failure to save means death). Ω

SAGE ADVICE

by Skip Williams

If you have any questions on the games produced by TSR, Inc., write to:

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We return to the D&D® game system in this column, with bits of advice for D&D® game players and Dungeon Masters. Page references are for the most recent editions of the various rule books — 1983 and later unless specified otherwise.

Campaigns

What do you think of house rules?

House rules are fine — sometimes. House rules are rotten at other times. Here are some of the key rules about house rules:

1. Make sure they are really necessary.
2. Make sure everybody knows about them ahead of time.
3. Enforce them consistently. They should be written down and used just like the published rules.
4. Change them promptly when they don't work out.
5. Remember that your house rules go only with your "house." Don't assume that they are in effect when you play in another game, and never give another DM a hard time about not using them. No set of house rules is better than the published rules or another DM's house rules — they're just different.

My friends and I are starting in a new D&D® game campaign, but the only characters we have are from an old AD&D® game campaign. Can we just transfer these characters to the new campaign?

We don't recommend transferring AD&D® game characters to the D&D® game; create new D&D® game characters instead. The two game systems involved are only superficially alike.

Is it okay for a player to have more than one character in a campaign?

Many players have more than one character in a given campaign. This allows a choice of characters for any particular adventure, and it insures that the player has a character to play if one of his characters gets involved in a prolonged adventure or project. Some DMs allow players to play more than one character at a time, but we recommend this when only a few people are playing; otherwise, it becomes too complicated to manage.

Characters

Is it possible for demi-humans to follow other classes after they have reached their maximum level? The notes in the demi-human section of the Companion Set *Players Companion* (page 29) seem to indicate that this is so.

Demi-humans never follow other classes. The notes that have you confused refer to the increased fighting abilities that demi-humans can gain after they have reached maximum level.

What are the "attack ranks" (A-M) noted in the *Players Companion*, pages 30-31?

"Attack Rank" refers to the column of the combat chart that the character may use. This allows demi-humans with extra experience to fight almost as well as fighters. The small letters (a-d) refer to other special abilities that demi-humans can get after reaching maximum level. These special abilities include multiple attacks per melee round and the other fighter combat options *(Players Companion,* page 18), and resistance to various attack forms. A careful rereading of the demi-humans section *(Players Companion,* pages 29-31) should clear up your confusion.

How long does lycanthropy take to set in? Can it be cured? Can a player character who is turned into a lycanthrope continue play?

Lycanthropy has an onset time of 2-24 (2d12) days, and until that time this magical disease is curable by a cleric of 11th or higher level. Once the change occurs, however, the afflicted character becomes a DM-controlled monster.

What happens when a cleric turns undead? Does the turning have a duration?

The undead run away from the cleric for one turn, then avoid the cleric for a full day, unless the cleric attacks them.

Other than for weapon mastery, what good are experience points

by Timothy Lethbridge

The Ecology of the Cave Fisher

Humans are its favorite catch

Arlach cursed as the flickering torch stub burned his fingers. He dropped it on the cavern floor and lit a new one from the dying flames. It was just one more annoyance on this wretched adventure.

He checked his remaining torches. Three left. He had spent an entire day exploring these tunnels, and he had found nothing but animal droppings and torch stubs — many, many torch stubs. These caverns were well explored, indeed. He could imagine the jeering laughter he would hear if he came out empty handed. But he would show them! He would show them all!

He had to, now.

Arlach sat down heavily on a nearby rock and pulled the map from his pouch. The Caverns of Gold Light, he read at the top. A bitter joke. Seventy gold autorachs just for a copy of this damned thing. But the map's name had promised treasure beyond all imagining. He had spent the last of his inheritance on this accursed map and the equipment to make the journey: his armor, horse, sword, torches, food, and waterskins. But everything had gone wrong from the very beginning. His armor rusted, his horse went lame, and half of his food rotted before he even reached the little village near these caverns. The only real shop in the whole hamlet was the stable, though it was full of fine horses for decent prices. Arlach decided to buy one when he finally found the treasure, when he could laugh in the face of the innkeeper just as the innkeeper had laughed in Arlach's.

"Perchance, could you direct me to the Caverns of Gold Light?" Arlach had asked him, knowing no better.

The innkeeper had roared with mirth. "No, can't say that I've ever heard of them! Unless you mean the Caverns of ***Cold*** Light, eh?" The entire tavern had joined the innkeeper in his laughter. Arlach's face reddened at the memory.

Arlach cursed and kicked at a patch of the slightly luminous fungus that grew all along the cavern walls, giving the place its true name. Without wanting to do so, Arlach looked closely at the map once again and saw where someone had altered the letter "C" to make it appear to be a "G." Sucker bait. He had been a fool not to have seen it before he'd started out, but he couldn't back out now. There was nothing left to do. Wearily, he clambered to his feet and began walking down the tunnel.

There, what was that? Arlach peered ahead into the dimly lit darkness. Was that a glint of gold up ahead? His depression forgotten, Arlach hurried forward and dropped to his knees in front of a pile of equipment and armor. He pawed through it. The gold was a brass buckle. Nothing of value here but three silver deneri — and a leatherbound book. Arlach held the torch high in one hand and opened the book with the other. The script was surprisingly large and sloppy, but it was literate. A diary . . . He flipped to the last entry.

I now write this testament not for my own salvation, but as a warning to others who come this way. If you find this book, take it out with you. You are in the gravest danger.

I have spent three days, as nearly as I can determine, in this sunless dungeon. In that time I have learned much of the creature that holds me prey — a cave fisher. I have heard little more than tavern rumors of these creatures. What I have heard gives me little hope; what I have seen gives me less.

There are two of these creatures: one that holds me and another on the far wall. The one that has me also captured Gastron and Marb; the one across the tunnel caught nimble Desell. Almost as soon as we were snared, Marb was butchered and eaten. His armor was stripped away like a corn husk by the monster's claws while he struggled and screamed, then it cut off his limbs and are him in pieces, devouring even his bones. The other fisher consumed Desell at the same rime, his shrieks of agony ringing in my ears. The fisher that caught me left myself and Gastron in its strands, securing us to the ledge on

either side of it. By chance, it left one of my arms free. It does me little good. Although I retained my dagger, I cannot cut through the strands. I can at least write this message by this living light.

Many long hours after our capture, the creature devoured Gastron. First, the monster dissolved his bindings with a liquid discharged through its snout. Gastron attempted to defend himself, but the creature dismembered my friend with the same ease as it had Marb. I watched him die. I know that I am cursed to be the last.

You who read this beware: Make no sound as you leave this area. I have discovered that the creature is blind. The great membranes that appear to be the cave fisher's eyes are actually ears. If I move my free arm as if to throw something at the creature, it makes no response — yet my pen scratches on this page agitate it. Were I to rap my knuckles on the ledge, I fear it would attack me. The one across the tunnel seems able to unerringly capture bats; perhaps it can hear the high-pitched cries they are reported by wizards to make.

I have noticed that these fishers have piled the gear from my dead comrades beneath them in the tunnel, as if they realize that such materials will attract prey. This indicates a greater intelligence than I have heard rumored of them, although it may simply be coincidence.

The last matter I must relay to you involves the possibility of escape. When Gastron was fighting the creature, he scored a blow on its head. The blood that dripped down fell upon his remaining bonds and dissol—

Arlach cursed as a glowing spark from the torch landed on his fingers. The torch dropped from his hand, hit the ground, and went out. Complete darkness fell. Continuing to swear, Arlach felt for his pack and began to rummage for his flint and tinder. He never felt the strand fall across his back until, with a startled cry, he was snatched off of his feet.

As the elf inspected the horse, the pudgy innkeeper rambled about its merits. "Yes, sir! That's one fine horse — a trifle lame, true, but that will pass in a few days. Besides, look at the price! Fifteen autorachs! You can't beat the price!"

The elf considered the offer in silence. Settling back to wait, the innkeeper reflected that maybe two days was too soon to be selling the boy's horse. But he had a buyer now, and the boy wasn't coming back. Young, cocky, treasure-happy — his kind never came back. It was not meant for regular folk to know what sorts of things lurked in caves and such. Why adventurers wanted to know, the innkeeper would never understand. Not that it mattered. Fools rushed in—

"I'll offer you eight autorachs," the elf said softly. "This poor creature is worth no more than that"

The innkeeper sighed, returning his thoughts to the matter at hand. "You drive a hard bargain, but for ten, I'll throw in an almost-new saddle. How 'bout it?"

Notes

The "eyes" of a cave fisher are actually multiple ears that allow it to capture its prey in the darkness with a high degree of accuracy. Because of this method of locating its prey, the cave fisher receives a bonus to hit when striking particularly noisy prey. Give the cave fisher a +2 bonus to hit against characters in metal armor or those who are talking. Give the fisher +1 to hit against characters performing less noisy actions such as carrying bags of coins or walking on hard ground. A thief (or an elf or halfling without metallic armor, attempting to surprise) may go unnoticed by a cave fisher if he can move silently; if he fails this roll, the cave fisher still has a -2 to hit due to the character's assumedly reduced noise. Tapping on the ground with a pole ahead of the party may induce a cave fisher to catch the pole instead (treat as AC 10).

The cave fisher's ears may hear sounds both below and above the human hearing range. Cave fishers often use this skill to catch bats flying nearby. If a cave fisher is presented with a number of different sounds associated with prey, it will fire at the loudest first; thus, it would choose an ogre in nailed boots over a nearby barefoot halfling. Casting a *silence 15'* radius spell on a cave fisher causes it to freeze, making claw attacks at -4 to hit if it is attacked.

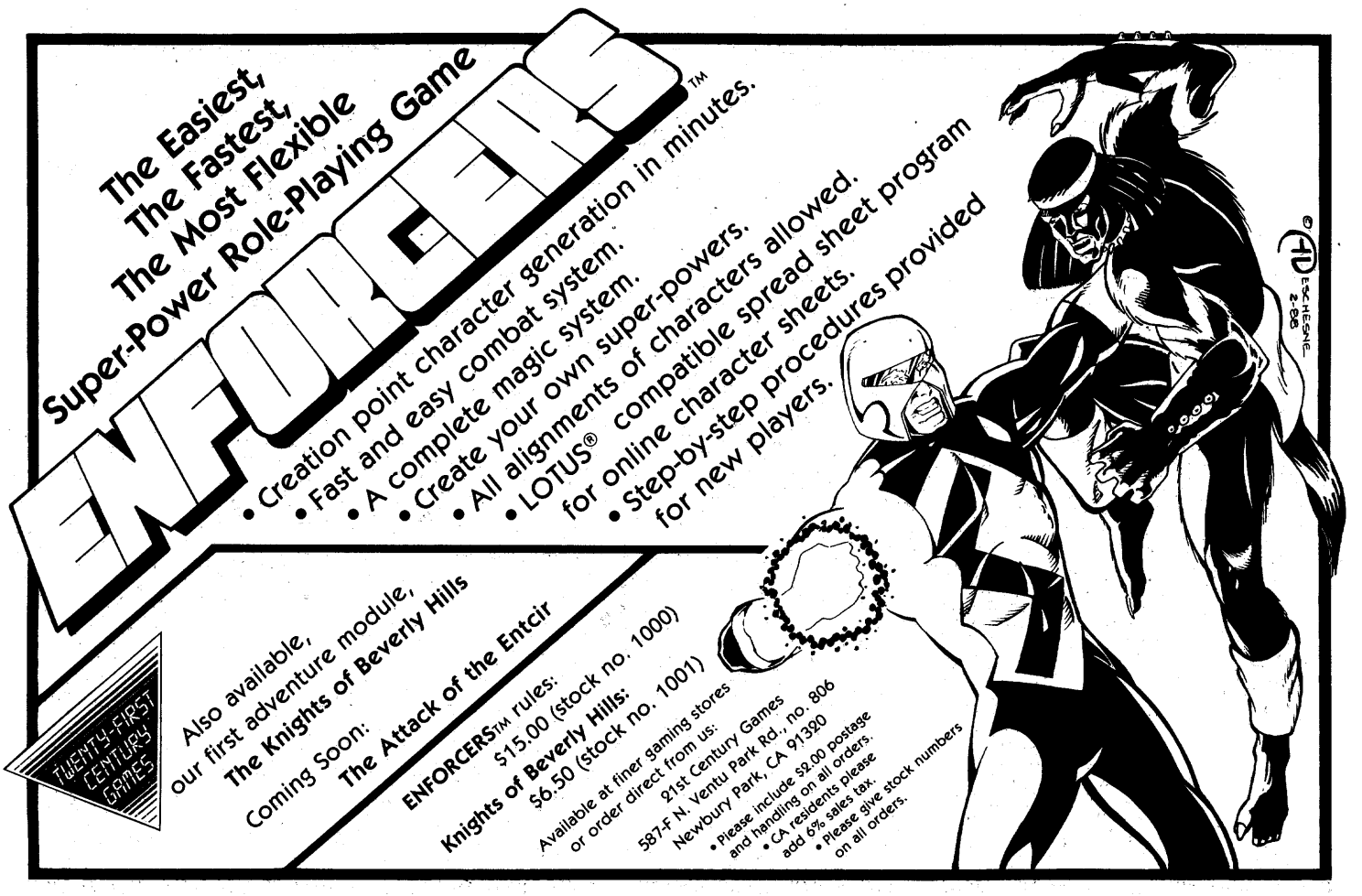
When the cave fisher captures more prey than it can eat, it stores the "extras" in a manner similar to a spider's. It wraps the prey in adhesive filaments, almost always tying down all of a victim's limbs. The fisher then uses its adhesive secretions to secure the victim to a wall or ledge nearby. When the creature desires to eat, it simply dissolves the bonds of the victim and dismembers him (this can lead to some interesting rescue scenarios). The cave fisher can survive on very little food, even a few bats a day if need be, but when there is a surplus available it can consume up to 200 lbs. of meat per day.

The filaments, the adhesive secretion, and the dissolving secretion are all discharged through the creature's proboscis. The filaments are stored in the organic winch behind the creature's head; the two secretions are stored in frontal cavities. Once removed from a cavity, the adhesive hardens within one turn. The dissolving secretion takes one round to work.

Cave fishers can live over 100 years. Once every 20 years, the female makes a high-pitched keening sound (above human or demi-human hearing) that brings all males within a 5-20 mile radius underground. The female mates with the first male to arrive, then kills him, rejecting the overtures of all others. Three days later, she lays a group of 5-9 eggs inside her mate's body and moves to a new spot. The eggs hatch within a month, and the young live for a short time on the carcass of their father. Three weeks after they are born, the young cave fishers are half grown, and they leave to establish lairs of their own. These half-grown cave fishers do half damage and 1+1 HD, but their armor class and movement remain the same. The young cave fishers reach full growth roughly one year after they are born.

Cave-fisher eggs 10 days old or less are greatly prized because of their high alcohol content, though they also contain other druglike substances. A single sip of the liquid found within the cave-fisher egg is enough to intoxicate a man for hours, bringing great delusions and hallucinations (save vs. poison or be confused for 1-4 hours; victim is merely *slowed* if he saves). Drinking an entire egg would be enough to kill a man (save vs. poison or die in 10-40 rounds). These fresh eggs bring 50-100 gp each in large cities. Neither the cave fisher's blood nor eggs older than 10 days have this property.

Cave-fisher lairs may have a large pile of equipment and treasure lying directly beneath them on a tunnel floor. Being semi-intelligent, the cave fisher is able to reason that this seems to attract prey, but it is not capable of more detailed planning. Ω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TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY GAMES

by Gregg Chamberlain

The Ecology of Carnivorous Plants

Illustration by Jonathan Hunt

Some plants like green thumbs all too well

Giant man-eating plants, like dragons, goblins, and other weird creatures, are staples of modern fantasy fiction and most traditional legends. In the realm of the AD&D® game, official "monster plants" (such as the hangman tree, the choke creeper, and the giant sundew) are representative of the genre. Carnivorous plants are not truly mythical, though the real ones are not as monstrous as fantasy works portray them. The following article explains the ecology of fantasy carnivorous plants based on that of their smaller, factual cousins.

In the real world, carnivorous plants are represented by the various species of sundews, pitcher plants, butterworts, bladderworts, rainbow plants, waterwheels, pink petticoats, and Venus' flytraps. In the AD&D game, these carnivorous plants are represented by the giant sundew *(Monster Manual II,* page 116) and by the giant pitcher plant and the giant Venus' flytrap (DRAGON® issue #89, "Creature Catalog," pages C-14 and C-18).

Most plants with which we are familiar sustain themselves through the process of photosynthesis. Chlorophyll, which is contained in the leaves of the plant and which gives green plants their color, transforms sunlight into chemical energy. This chemical reacts with water (which is absorbed through the roots) and carbon dioxide (which is taken in through the leaves) to produce carbohydrates. These carbohydrates, along with the minerals and trace elements absorbed through the root system, are then utilized by the plant for its growth and development. Mosses, lichens, mushrooms, ferns, and the like are considered lower members of the plant kingdom because they either do not photosynthesize or lack other characteristics of green plants (such as a proper root system, reproduction via seeds, fertilization through pollination, etc.).

Carnivorous plants belong in the category of green plants, possessing all the requirements for classification as such plus two other traits which take them a step beyond most such plants: the ability to self-reproduce without pollination and (most importantly) the ability to actively prey on insects and other minute animals for food.

Carnivorous plants are usually found in bogs, swamps, and freshwater marshes. The soil in these environments has a lower content of minerals and elements than is acceptable to most green plants. The lack of nitrogen, phosphorous, potassium, and calcium results from the high acid content of the water, which may be caused by frequent rains that leech minerals out of the soil. In warmer climates, this lack may be caused by a higher rate of bacterial decay which also uses up precious materials needed for plant growth. Plants such as the sundew, pitcher plant, and others have adapted to these poor growing conditions by evolving means for trapping and digesting living prey as supplements to their diets.[1]

Despite the broad range of some species of carnivorous plants, they are on the whole limited by their specialization to their ecological niches — acidic bogs, marshes, and certain alkaline marls. In the northern temperate and subarctic regions, sphagnum bogs are a favored habitat. These bogs are the remains of ancient glacial lakes which have gradually become filled with decayed plant and animal remains. The stagnant waters are overgrown with moss and slowly become more acidic. The young bog then becomes the home of pitcher plants, sundews, and bladderworts, with butterworts growing along the sandy parts of the shoreline. A marl bog is formed by the seepage of spring water over a flat surface that has a foundation of limestone deposits. This results in the percolation of calcium carbonate throughout the water, making it more alkaline than normal and producing the same mineral-deficient conditions that exist in acidic bogs. Some pitcher plants and sundews have adapted to marl bogs.

In more temperate climates, acidic bogs may develop beside old lakes and sluggish streams and springheads. The movement of water under these conditions is too feeble to prevent stagnation. Here may be found pitcher plants, sundews, and bladderworts. In still warmer areas, savannah or grass-edge bogs form in low, flat, or slightly sloping areas with sandy soil and a high water table. The predominant vegetation consists of grasses, sedges, and widely scattered long-needle pines. Under these conditions may be found pitcher plants, bladderworts, butterworts, sundews, and Venus' flytraps.

Besides their restricted habitats (an especially serious problem for the Venus' flytrap, which is confined to savannah bogs), carnivorous plants are threatened by the encroachment of more common green plants as the bog matures. By adapting to the mineral-poor conditions of the bog, carnivorous plants eventually change the bog by increasing the supply of nitrates, phosphates, and other minerals when those plants die and decay. As the acid level drops and the soil becomes richer and sweeter, other plants more accustomed to such growing conditions move in and crowd out the carnivorous plants.

All flowering plants normally reproduce by cross-pollination of their flowers by insects or the wind.[2] Carnivorous plants normally reproduce by this means, but they are also capable of reproducing themselves asexually.

For instance during pollination, the seeds of the Venus' flytrap are black and pear-shaped when it reproduces. The Venus' flytrap's asexual means of reproduction involves a fleshy, white, underground rhizome that elongates annually and from which new Venus' flytraps may grow. This underground rhizome also makes it very difficult for fire and other natural disasters to completely destroy the plant. Where temperature conditions are subject to uneven fluctuations (alternating warm and cool spring days, for example), the plant can also reproduce itself by budding. Through this process, the flowers of the plant are replaced by miniature plants which take root around the "mother" and grow normally. As a result, Venus' flytraps may be found growing in colonies.

The seeds of the pitcher plant are teardrop shaped and range in color from brown to pinkish gray. Like the Venus' flytrap, this plant may reproduce asexually by means of a rhizome; resulting in colonies of pitcher plants connected to the mother plant). The giant pitcher plant in DRAGON issue #89 resembles the Australian pitcher plant, which can also reproduce asexually in a manner similar to that of the strawberry plant. The pitcher plant, in this case, possesses a root which acts as a central node for its thick, branching roots. Some of these roots form foliage leaves above ground in the shape of a rosette. In the fall, a pitcher plant embryo forms around the center of these rosettes. As the embryo grows, the runner leaf stalk lengthens, taking the embryo away from the mother plant. Soon, the leaf stalk ceases growing and the embryo plant rests on soil where it takes root.

The sundew's seeds are black and elliptical. Sundews living in the northern parts of the world or in mountainous climes form hibernacula to survive the winter. A hibernaculum is a small, tight, spherical

cluster of budlike young leaves that are hairy in appearance. The butterwort also shares this feature. Similarly, the hangman tree's taproot, which allows it to survive the winter, may be a further modification on the use of the hibernaculum.

The trapping season for carnivorous plants generally runs from spring until the middle of autumn and the winter dieback. Trapping methods among the carnivorous plants fall into either active or passive traps. Among the active traps are the bear-trap variety, used by the Venus' flytrap and the waterwheel plant, and the trap-door of the bladderwort. Less complex are the passive traps used by sundews, butterworts, and rainbow plants; these plants secrete a type of mucilage to form a sticky "flypaper" trap to ensnare their victims. The simplest trap is the passive pitfall used by the many species of pitcher plants.

The traps themselves are actually leaves that have been so modified by evolution that they are now barely recognizable as leaves. All the carnivorous plants, except for primitive species of pitcher plant, have developed digestive glands within these leaves. These glands secrete a mild enzyme to aid the breakdown and absorption of nutrients from the plant's victims. In the case of the flypaper variety of carnivorous plants, the leaves have also developed glands to produce and secrete the mucilage used in the trap.

How did these traps evolve, and how do they work? All plants have tropisms — reactions to particular stimuli — that help them find water, light, and nutrients; tropisms also help the plants avoid noxious substances and conditions. If seeking or avoiding something, a plant can control the growth of its cells and alter the direction of such growth by increasing and decreasing cell growth on either side of the plant. For example, the mimosa plant can fold up its leaves whenever certain insects approach with the intent of eating the leaves. For most carnivorous plants, this controlled cell growth is accelerated to the point where the plant's movements are faster than the eye can track.

In the case of the Venus' flytrap, prey is attracted to the plant's trap either by the red color on the inside of the trap-leafs lobes (which resembles raw meat) or by the scent of nectar produced by glands along the edge of each lobe. (All carnivorous plants have nectar-producing abilities and, except for the waterwheel and the bladderwort, use scent as a lure.) Within the trap are six trigger hairs arranged in triangular groups of three on each lobe. The victim must brush two of the trigger hairs or one trigger hair twice in order for the plant to react. The first brushing of a trigger hair causes an electrical impulse to be stored in the leaf tissue, readying the trap. The second brushing sends a second impulse that causes the outer cells of the lobes to grow an additional 25%, thus causing the trap to close.

This growth spurt is very rapid; closure time for flytraps has been clocked at one-twentieth of a second. During cool weather, when the plant's reactions have slowed, the spikes that fringe the edges of the leaf lobes help contain the prey until the trap is fully closed.[3] When fully closed, cell growth in the lobes continues, forcing the lobes together, pushing the air out of the trap, and squeezing the prey. To open, the inner cells of the leaf lobes grow an additional 25%, thus forcing the lobes to move apart from each other. The traps are capable of opening and closing several times a day; thus, rapid growth of individual traps is possible.

Venus' flytraps can survive periodic flooding, when their traps catch food in the form of insect larvae, tadpoles, and the like. A good-sized meal for the plant results in an overall growth spurt. The Venus' flytrap is capable of distinguishing between edible and inedible objects placed within its traps; it is also able to judge the size of objects so that it doesn't waste time on puny prey or things which it can't eat (as is also true for the giant Venus' flytrap).

The same principle of controlled cell growth permits the sundew to curl its armlike leaves around insects held helpless in the plant's glue. It also allows the butterwort to curl the edges of its trapping leaves to form a cup to hold digestive juices used for drowning prey that succumbs to the lure of its sticky surfaces.

Sundews, butterworts, and rainbow plants, by utilizing their mucilaginous surfaces to trap insect prey, are merely taking defenses used by plants a step further. Consider the South African roridgula, which has developed a carpet of sticky hairs over its stems and leaves as a defense against insect pests. The roridgula has also developed a symbiotic relationship with species of ambush bugs and spiders. Both of these creatures make their homes among the sticky strands of the plant and feast on insects caught by the glue.[4]

The pitcher plant may have been the first carnivorous plant to evolve because its method of catching prey is the simplest of all: a pitfall trap formed by the plant's leaves, which have grown together so that

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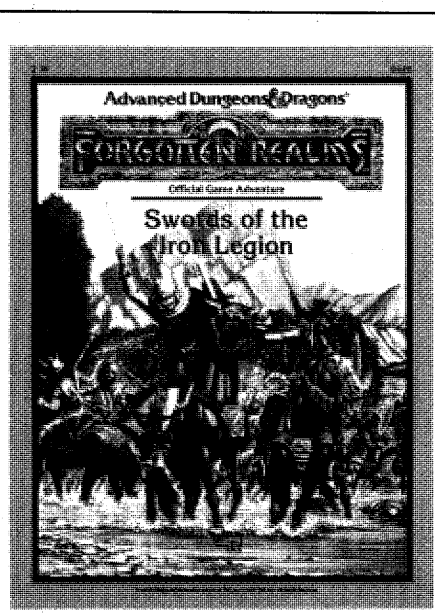

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water collects in the bottom of the pitcher and drowns whatever falls in. An intermediate stage in the evolution of the pitcher plant can be seen in the common teasel plant, whose cuplike leaves grow together around the stem, allowing water to collect and form miniature pools that protect the plant against insect pests crawling up the stem. The pitcher plant took this means of defense and evolved it into a means of trapping prey.

The more primitive species of pitcher plant rely on natural decay to break victims down into necessary nutrients for the plants to absorb. Other species of pitcher plant have developed digestive glands and wetting agents in the water inside the trap which help waterlog the victim and hasten drowning. There is some speculation among botanists that the nectar of the plant may contain a narcotic; this increases the likelihood that exploring insects fall in due to drunkenness.[5]

Fantasy carnivorous plants (i.e., the hangman tree and others) are higher on the evolutionary ladder than the common species of such plants. This higher evolutionary status may range from simple giantism without drastic departures from the original plant (as in the case of the giant Venus' flytrap) to improvements on the original plant design (as in the case of the giant pitcher plant which, in addition to giantism and heightened tropic senses, has great, long tendrils for snaring and drawing prey into its stomach).[6]

The carnivorous plants in the AD&D game world have further developed alternative methods of catching prey, as is evidenced by the tri-flower frond, the man-trap, and the bloodthorn. The tri-flower frond and the man-trap use their pollen as both a lure and a drug to entice and kill their victims, much as actual carnivorous plants utilize their nectar as an insect lure (and as the pitcher plant might use narcotic nectar).

The bloodthorn has taken two characteristics of plants — thorns as a means of defense, and the principles of capillary attraction (which enable plants to feed themselves) — and has combined these into a unique means of attacking prey and feeding on it. Capillary attraction is the tendency for liquids confined in small tubes to rise up through the tubes as a result of surface tension. An example of capillary attraction is shown by placing a straw in a glass of water. Surface tension draws the water up the straw from the open bottom until a balance is achieved and the water ceases to rise. If straws of different diameters are placed in the same glass, the water will rise higher in narrower straws than in wide ones because of the differences in surface tension.

Two types of tissues are involved. in a plant's use of capillary action and attraction: xylem and phloem. Xylem is the woody tissue that provides support for the plant, much in the same way that skeletons provide support for animal bodies. The cells in xylem, through capillary action and attraction, absorb the water and minerals taken in by the roots and move them up to the leaves for photosynthesis. This process in turn creates the food material that is transported throughout the plant by the phloem tissues through capillary action and attraction.

In the bloodthorn, the phloem tissues connect directly with the plant's hollow thorns. When a successful strike is made by the plant, the liquid blood of the victim rises into the narrow opening of each thorn tip and is absorbed by the phloem cells. By devising a method of feeding directly on the already-dissolved nutrients in its victims' life fluids, the bloodthorn has bypassed the need to develop digestive glands like other carnivorous plants.

Some of the species of fantasy carnivorous plants have evolved forms of vegetable musculature similar to octopus tentacles (the giant pitcher plant being the most obvious example). This has allowed some plants, such as the giant sundew, to become mobile and so increase their chances of survival by allowing movement from one location to another as an environment becomes unsuitable for them.

The development of musculature in fantasy carnivorous plants presumes also the possible development of some form of nervous system. An increasingly complex nervous system allows the evolution of intelligence, such as typified by the semi-intelligent giant sundew. Intelligence is a survival trait; the greater a plant's intelligence, the greater its chance of continuing as a species. In AD&D game terms, such intelligence may rise high enough to permit the development of a moral sense and an alignment other than the neutrality typical of lower animals and plants.

Both the hangman tree and the black willow are, at present, the only carnivorous plants in the AD&D game universe that deviate from an absolutely neutral alignment.[7] The tendency of both towards evil in their alignments may be due to the low level of intelligence ascribed to the plants (the black willow, though capable of possessing greater than average intelligence, does not use this intelligence to the

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best advantage). Creatures of low intelligence that do not possess the wisdom to control their impulsive actions tend to act to satisfy their immediate desires without consideration for others. This lack of control can also hinder the efficient application of high intelligence.[8]

The hangman tree has sufficient intelligence to learn and speak the common tongue — albeit haltingly (a feat the black willow hasn't yet accomplished).[9] Nevertheless, the deception abilities of both the hangman tree and the black willow are limited, with the hangman tree using hallucinatory perfume and the black willow using its aura of drowsiness). Neither plant uses even small treasure items as a lure, possibly because they themselves are uninterested in gold and the like. Even the killer mimic is smart enough to realize it has a better chance of attracting prey by disguising itself as some valuable object.

It is fortunate for adventurers that these trees, the highest forms of carnivorous plant presently known, are more cunning than clever; if it were otherwise, PCs might encounter these trees more often and more to their detriment. However, adventurers should be concerned by the hangman tree's development of magic resistance as a survival trait. If the trend towards greater intelligence in fantasy carnivorous plants continues, future species of carnivorous plants may very well use spells to hunt their prey.

Footnotes

1. Carnivorous plants, because they have retained their abilities to photosynthesize, can live a "meatless" existence; during these periods, however, their growth is slower than usual and may even be stunted. As a result, a carnivorous plant that has gone through some lean times may be only one-half to three-fourths normal size, with corresponding reductions in hit dice and damage.

2. AD&D game carnivorous plants may still be capable of reproducing this way through pollination via species of giant bees, wasps, and so forth, as well as via the normal smaller species of these insects. Seeds from carnivorous plants, though, are best harvested in the fall season. After the plant is destroyed, PCs may gather up to 2-20 seeds in perfect condition, undamaged by the battle. If PCs employ nonpoisonous means to subdue a plant peacefully, the number of useable seeds recoverable may be doubled.

3. In issue #89's version of the Venus' flytrap, the "teeth" that fringe the edges of the lobes act to trigger the trap and prevent the prey from escaping before the trap is fully closed.

4. Such a symbiotic relationship might exist between the AD&D game's giant sundew (or other sessile carnivorous plants) and certain large insects or other creatures. These creature may lure prey witthin the plant's reach in exchange for scraps from the plant's feeding; they may also find a safe home with immunity from the plant's attack.

5. The giant pitcher plant may have retained the narcotic qualities of its nectar. Thus, those characters who fall prey to the plant may become unconscious from the fumes inside the plant's stomach. Characters should save vs. poison each round they are inside the plant. Failure results in unconsciousness lasting until the victim is either consumed or removed from the plant. In the latter case, the victim remains unconscious for an additional 1-6 turns. After regaining consciousness, the victim suffers slowed reactions for 3d10 rounds, with all attacks, defenses, reactions, and dexterity bonuses at -1.

6. Popular belief has it that certain real species of pitcher plants are able to close off the mouths of their traps with their hooded leaves, preventing victims from escaping. The giant pitcher plant may have evolved the ability to actually seal off its mouth opening. Characters who attempt to open these coverings must be able to brace themselves and successfully roll their *bend bars/lift gates* chances.

7. The zygom also deviates from absolute neutrality due to its evil nature, although it cannot be rated on a scale of intelligence. The zygom has been excluded from discussion for the latter reason. Furthermore, while the *Monster Manual II* states that the zygom prefers living flesh and blood for sustenance, it does not actually hunt prey. Instead, it lives a parasitic existence on any host body it finds.

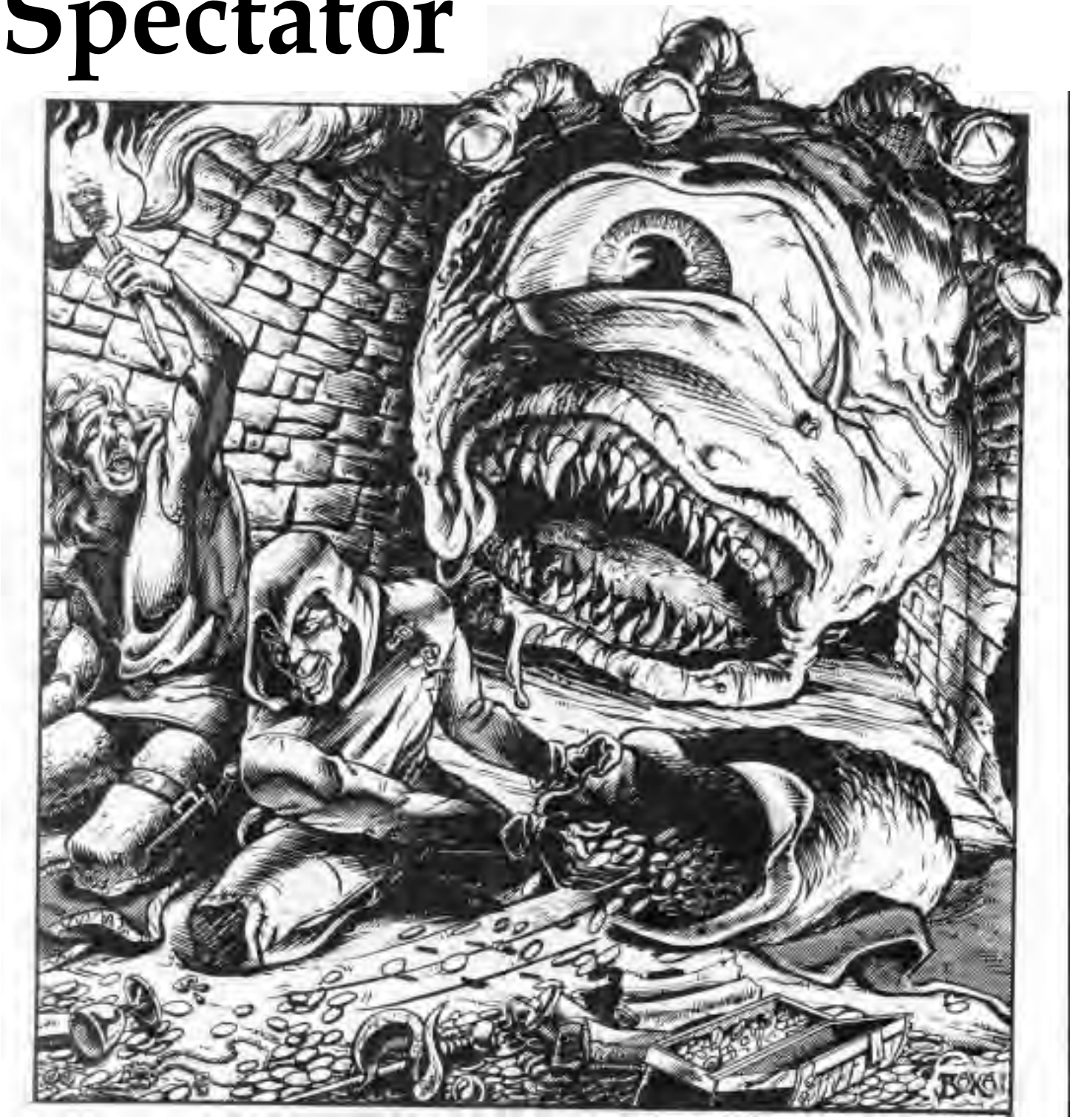
8. Since both the black willow and the hangman tree are members of the plant kingdom, perhaps they cannot truly be judged by human standards. They prey on animals (including humans) for food just as many animals prey on plants for food. (Such relativistic hairsplitting is best left to philosophers and sages.)

9. One of the knotlike protuberances on the hangman tree which usually serves as a sensory organ for the tree may have evolved a primitive vocal apparatus. This may also explain the halting nature of the plant's speech, as the tree draws in and stores air in the knot, later expelling it in brief blasts of vocalization.

Ω

by Dougal Demokopoliss

The Ecology of the Spectator



A promise made is a promise kept — for 101 years

From Curiosities of Other Worlds, *volume six, by Mage-Lord I. J. Jijaks of the Free City of Greyhawk:*

We now come to spectators, which dwell on the plane of Nirvana in either the Dominion of Lendor[1] or in the land of the modrons. The reader has no doubt read the basic description of these striking creatures in any one of the manuals and tomes that catalog the beasts of this world and others. Having performed the usual research required before summoning and interacting with these beholder-like beings, I am able to share my knowledge in hopes that it will prove to be of use to the reader as well.

Spectators are adapted to equal amounts of light and dark, heat and cold, and liquid and solid terrain. (Nirvana is perfectly balanced in all of these qualities.) Spectators have generous lifespans, and most of these creatures live over 1,000 years. Many of these spectators at any given time are guarding objects throughout the Prime Material plane, as they are often commanded to do so by high-level magic-users.

Spectators are summoned by the casting of a *monster summoning V* spell, accompanied by the sacrifice of at least three beholder's eyes. During the sacrificial rite, the beholder's eyes must first be annihilated — that is, the eyes must be ground into a fine powder, then burned into a black dust. This black dust is then soaked in oil and placed in a special magic circle. Next, the dust is set aflame. Finally, while the eye dust is still burning, a small bag is placed in the center of the magic circle and *monster summoning V* is cast by the magic-user. (The burning eye dust is used as a material component instead of a candle.) The bag opens a small one-way *gate* from Nirvana to the plane on which the spell is cast.

Three segments later, there is a chance that a spectator appears in the center of the magic circle; for each beholder's eye so sacrificed, there is a 10% chance that a spectator is summoned (thus, a base chance of 30% for three eyes). Three segments after the spell has been cast, the *gate* closes again. If summoned into a properly created magic circle, the spectator awaits instructions from its summoner (which invariably entail the guarding of some item or location). Inside this magic circle, the spectator is powerless to *teleport* to Nirvana, leave the circle physically, or use any other powers besides *levitation.* If the circle has not been created properly or if the circle is somehow broken before the spectator promises to complete its job, it *teleports* back to Nirvana. If the summoner gives the spectator a job besides guardianship, the spectator merely states it is unwilling to do so and *teleports* back to Nirvana as soon as the magic circle is broken. Even if the spectator is given a task concerning guardianship, it will instead *teleport* to Nirvana unless it actually promises to fulfill its task.

Spectators dislike guarding for beings of lesser races (i.e., the races of their human or demi-human summoners), so they always try to avoid such guardianship. However, a spectator will not return to Nirvana after it has made a promise to anyone, because of its lawful-neutral alignment; breaking a promise is considered chaotic behavior. A spectator prides itself on its guardianship and will refuse if a summoner tries to force it to do a job other than guarding. From the spectator's viewpoint, it is not lawful for the summoner to force the spectator to perform a job other than guarding, as spectators should be summoned only to guard.

Once the spectator takes its mission of guardianship, the summoning magic-user deliberately breaks the magic circle and frees the spectator, allowing it to move over to the treasure to be guarded. The creature is free after 101 years to return to Nirvana. A *permanency* spell has no effect on the circle or the duration of the spectator's guardianship.

As a guardian, a spectator's loyalty to its summoner's commands is absolute; it will guard the place or object for *precisely* 101 years. A spectator always knows when the 101 years of service have expired; this is tracked by the spectator's internal clock, actually a lobe on the spectator's brain that perfectly measures time.

When a spectator is guarding the place or objects to which it has been assigned, it will allow *no one* to pass that place or examine any objects it is guarding. At the time the summoner assigns the task, he can make exceptions to these rules, such as allowing certain individuals to circumvent these conditions. This rule applies even to the summoner himself. If the summoner breaks these rules himself, he will be attacked by the spectator.

When a spectator attacks, it launches spells from three of the four small eyes perched on stalks over its globular body. It also tries to keep out of melee range for as long as possible by using its *levitation* powers. A spectator will *teleport* to Nirvana if all of its eyes have been blinded, but if encountered in Nirvana itself and if all of its eyes have been blinded, the spectator attacks with its toothy maw.[2]

To a spectator, killing a creature for reasons other than self-defense or duty is viewed as a chaotic act. Under a spectator's sense of justice and law, all creatures have the right to live, so long as they do not interfere with the spectator's duties. If a spectator accidentally kills a creature for reasons other than self-defense, it usually wills itself to die, directing its brain's powerful energies against itself.

Spectators have two social classes, upper and lower. Lower-class spectators live in otherwise uninhabited sections of Nirvana in the Dominion of Lendor or in the "modron disk," each residing alone in a small, vertical cave which is dug out with the spectator's mouth. Upper-class spectators are those who directly serve Lendor or serve as guards for the modrons. These spectators are more lawful and philosophical than their lower-class counterparts because they have usually been educated by their masters to uphold their ideals. In order to become a guard for the modrons, a spectator must *paralyze* a modron rogue unit (using one of its attack eyes) and turn it over to the local pentadrone regimental headquarters (the modrons' law enforcers). Lendor chooses only the most powerful and intelligent spectators to serve him.[3]

Unlike modrons, spectators are not completely lawful neutral, although upper-class spectators come very close to this ideal. Lower-class spectators have slightly lawful-good tendencies, while upper-class spectators are more strictly lawful neutral. Because of its personal honor, a spectator will not attack a *paralyzed* or helpless enemy unless the spectator was attacked by trickery or by very cruel means.

Spectators have little personal ambition; perhaps their only true goal in life is to serve the forces of law as well as possible. Since modrons are completely lawful neutral, most spectators want to serve the modrons. The greatest pleasures of a spectator (and perhaps its only pleasures) are to thwart chaos, especially modron rogue units, and to guard and defend.

What little is known of the internal anatomy of the spectator is presented here as well. This information on its most unique body organs was collected from the works of several wizards and priests who voyaged to Nirvana and took part in the dissection (with permission) of a spectator slain by a rogue modron unit.

Levator magnus: The levator magnus is a small, highly magical sphere in the center of the spectator's brain (which itself lies at the center of the spectator's round body). This organ gives the spectator its ability to *levitate* in any direction at 100′ per minute. No magic negates this effect, although physical forces resulting from magic use (such as those created by a *gust of wind* spell) hamper this activity. The juices drained from this organ are sometimes used as a component in the ink of a scroll of *flying* or *levitation.*

Brain: The spectator's brain has the power to generate a magical force using psionic energy, though the spectator has no true psionic powers as such. This magical force is divided into two branches of power: magical and antimagical. The magical power travels through special nerves to the monster's top four eyes, which convert the power into spell-like effects. The antimagical power is carried by nerves directly to the creature's large eye, causing any spell that strikes the eye to reflect back to the caster. The juices drained from the spectator's brain can be used as a component in the ink of an *antimagic shell* scroll. (It is to my understanding that the higher sorts of modrons will actually sell or barter the bodies of slain spectators to those who would make use of the corpses for their research, and even some spectators will likewise bargain

away the bodies of their kind.)

Thought-energy enhancer: This organ multiplies the psionic force generated in the brain and relays it to the spectator's eyes, providing their powers.

Stomach: Food and water created by a spectator's first eye is usually directed inward through a large passage leading directly to the stomach, where it is digested. If the spectator wishes, food can be created by that eye to feed someone else.

Skin: The skin of a spectator is thick, lumpy, rubbery, and grayish, with many blood vessels protruding from its surface. If a spectator is killed but not severely damaged, the skin can be removed and fashioned into a suit of armor by an experienced armorer. The resultant suit is in all respects the equal of leather armor and is sufficient in size to be of use to a dwarf, gnome, or the like.

Little else about these beings is known to me. I am at a loss to know how they reproduce, what they have in the way of religion (though I suspect they worship Primus or Lendor in their own fashions), or even if they have a loose culture. I never got around to discussing these matters with the few spectators I had occasion to meet. ,I have even heard that a breed of spectators lives in the sea, though this report is surely based upon a mistaken identification of an eye of the deep. Perhaps someone more learned than I can fill in the details another day. . . .

Game information

When a spectator reaches 1,000 years of age, its four eyes grow very large, and its body becomes small and shriveled. After three months in this state, the spectator has only 3 + 3 HD; after six months, it has only 2 + 2 HD, and its four eyes are twice as large as they were originally. By this time, the spectator must retire permanently to a cave it has dug, since it can no longer *levitate.* Upper-class spectators serving the modrons are thrown out of the upper class at this age, but Lendor's spectators are allowed to stay in his palace until their deaths. In three more months, the spectator's body is extremely small and shriveled with 1+ 1 HD, and each of its small eyes has developed four tiny eyestalks. Finally, when a spectator reaches 1,001 years of age, nothing is left of its body. At this time, its four eyes fall off their stalks to become 1 + 1 HD spectators.

These "newborn" spectators have the power of the eye from which they came plus *levitation.* They stay in the cave in which they were born for one year, gaining an extra eye power and 1 + 1 HD every three months. The spectator with the *create food and water* ability shares the food it creates with the others. In the last three months of the spectators' stay in the birth cave, each gains the antimagical power of the large eye. When the spectators are fully developed after one year, they leave the cave to build lairs of their own. Spectators under one year of age or over 999 years of age are immune to the *monster summoning V* spell.

SEARECHTER (Marine spectator)

FREQUENCY: *Very rare*
NO. APPEARING: *1*
ARMOR CLASS: *Body 6, eyes -1, eyestalks 8*
MOVE: *–/20"//40" (B in water, E in air)*
HIT DICE: *6 + 6*
% IN LAIR: *35%*
TREASURE TYPE: *See below*
NO. OF ATTACKS: *1 bite*
DAMAGE/ATTACK: *1-2*
SPECIAL ATTACKS: *See below*
SPECIAL DEFENSES: *See below*
MAGIC RESISTANCE: *50%*
INTELLIGENCE: *High to exceptional*
ALIGNMENT: *Lawful neutral*
SIZE: *L (5½' diameter)*
PSIONIC ABILITY: *Special*
Attack/Defense modes: *Nil/nil*
LEVEL/XP VALUE: *VII/865 + 9 hp*

Among a select few wizards (usually those from coastal cities or who are masters of summoning), there are rumors of a race of marine spectators dedicated to slaying eyes of the deep. In the WORLD OF GREYHAWK® setting, these are the elven and human wizards living on the Spindrift Isles. The Suel god Lendor, believed to be an Arch-Mage by many, taught the inhabitants of the Spindrifts how to summon spectators. Spectators living in Lendor's stronghold heard these rumors of their marine cousins and passed them on to their summoners.

Although there is such a creature as the marine spectator, it is cautious and actually avoids eyes of the deep. These marine spectators are also called sea spectators, spectators of the sea, or (most commonly) searechters. They dwell in the depths of the ocean and are very rarely encountered, and then are nearly always mistaken for eyes of the deep.

If a wizard reseaches the means of summoning a searechter, he finds that one can be summoned by the casting of *monster summoning VII* spell, with three small eyes from an eye of the deep employed in place of three beholder's eyes. The wizard must cause the searechter to appear underwater or it will not be brought forth. Few sorcerers has ever tried this summoning because of the difficulties in obtaining the proper material components.

Searechters have six small eyes on the end of six eyestalks and one large central eye which functions as does a spectator's Each of its small eyes has a spell-like function, explained as follows. Each power is usable three times per day and functions as if cast by an 8th-level spell-caster.

Eye no.	Spell
1	*Airy water*
2	*Airbolt* (new spell)
3	*Charm monster*
4	*Fear* (as wand)
5	*Water breathing*
6	*Paralyzation* (as wand)

In front of each of the searechter's eyes is a thin, clear shell that has a magical equivalence to + 3 metal. If the searechter is killed, this "eye crystal" can be removed and fashioned into small weapons such as dart tips and dagger blades of + 3 value. Likewise, if a strap is somehow attached to the large eye crystal, it can be used as a + 3 (and transparent) small shield. Nonetheless, it is difficult to cut and melt this material in order to fashion it into weapons or defensive items. Finding a way to do so is difficult and should be left to the discretion of the DM.

Any attack made upon a searechter has a 50% chance of hitting its body, a 25% chance of hitting its large eye, and a 25% chance of hitting one of the six small eyes on top (with, in the latter case, an 80% chance that the attack hits an eyestalk and a 20% chance that it hits one of the small eyes directly; which eye is hit is determined at random). A successful hit upon one of the small eyes blinds that eye and

Airbolt (Alteration)
Level: 3 Components: *V*
Range: *1"/level* CT: 3 *segments*
Duration: *Instant.* ST: *None*
AE: *One target*
Explanation/Description: By means of this spell, a magic-user is able to create a concentrated blast of air roughly 3" in diameter. Using only verbal components, this spell utilizes the air around it and focuses it into a powerful beam that may then be directed by the spell-caster. Although this spell works underwater (where oxygen exists in a hydrogenated form), it will not work in a vacuum. *Airbolt* may be used as an offensive weapon, a powerful version of *gust of wind,* or a modified *push* spell. Because of the spells concentrated beam, only one creature or item may be targeted per spell. Damage for this spell is 1d6 per level (or 2d6 per level underwater, due to the greater ability to concentrate the spell in this medium). A saving throw vs. spells allows the one attacked to take half damage. The spell-caster blows a puff of air as this spell is cast.

With regard to the searechter, *airbolt* has a range of 6" in water and 2" in air, and it does 6-36 hp damage in water and 3-18 hp damage in air. The *airbolt* is not as potent in the air because it diffuses, whereas the spell is enhanced by the dense medium of water. A saving throw vs. spells allows the target creature to dodge a portion of the spells blast. The bolt is guided by sight, so a blinded searechter cannot cast this spell.

ruins its power until it regenerates. Eyestalks take 5 hp damage before being severed, but the eyestalk and the eye on the end regrow within one day. The large eye takes 5 hp damage until it is destroyed and takes two days to regenerate.

A searechter never voluntarily goes out of the water and only rarely enters waters less than 15,000′ in depth. For every 1,000′ closer to the surface than 15,000′, the searechter takes 1 hp damage per turn; above the surface of the water, it takes 2 hp damage per round. This is a result of the expansion of the searechter's internal gases. These damage figures are given in case the searechter is somehow brought into shallow waters or to the surface. In the water, searechters are very agile; however, in the air they have less movement control because of the damage they take from being out of water and because of their increased speed.

Searechters usually live in small sea caves, but there is a 25% chance they will live in different lairs. Roll the percentile dice on the following table to determine the lair of each:

1d100	Lair
01-75	Small sea cave
76-85	Sunken ship
86-90	Ruins or abandoned lair
91-96	Extensive cavern
97-99	Labyrinth of vortexes to or from the plane of Elemental Water
00	Vortex leading to the water-filled caverns under Lendor's stronghold on Nirvana

Ruins or abandoned lairs could include a ruined storm giant palace, morkoth lair, triton stronghold, sea dragon lair, aboleth city, kraken lair, and many others. A vortex is a gateway leading to or from another plane. If the vortex leads to the plane of Elemental Water, there is a 50% chance that water flows into it (creating a whirlpool) and a 50% chance that water rushes out of it, filling the worlds oceans. If the vortex leads to Lendor's stronghold, it will be full of water and without current; this is the gateway by which Lendor. brought searechters to this world.

There is a 75% chance that a searechter has some creatures enslaved by its *charm monster* ability. The slaves are usually humanoid in appearance, such as sahuagin. Slaves hunt for and protect the searechter. There are usually 2-12 hit dice of slaves, but usually no one creature with over 4 HD (2 HD is the average slave's level). Searechters do not usually have treasure except that of their slaves or the treasure in the sunken ship or ruins they may inhabit.

The coloration of a searechter is either dark blue or black. Its body is similar in appearance to an eye of the deep's, with three eyestalks on each side of the body and two fins on its back like the wings of a messenger monodrone.

Footnotes

[1] See DRAGON® issue #86 for more information on the Suel deity Lendor.

[2] The spectator attacks with only a -2 on its "to hit" rolls because of its ability to psionically sense intelligent opponents, though the spectator does not have any other psionic abilities. In this manner, the spectator gains an accurate idea of where its enemies are located. If the spectator is attacking a creature with no brain, such as a golem or a skeleton, it suffers the usual -4 penalty on "to hit" rolls.

[3] When a magic-user summons a spectator, the DM should roll percentile dice to determine the class of spectator. A roll of 01-75 means a lower-class spectator appears; a roll of 76-99 means an upper-class spectator appears; and a result of 00 means the magic-user has summoned one of Lendor's favorite spectators (which has 36 hp and high intelligence). In this latter case, Lendor will eventually come to the Prime Material plane, release the spectator from its bondage, and return to Nirvana with his elite spectator, without bothering the summoner further. Ω

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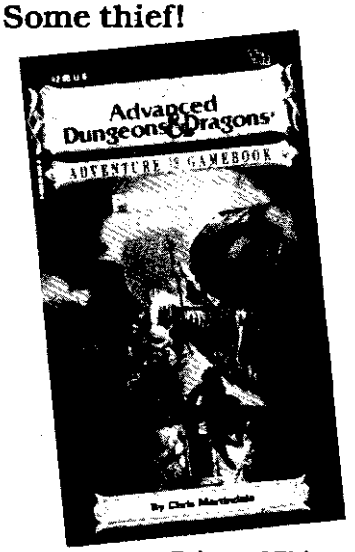

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by Tony Jones

The Ecology of the Kech

What evil lurks in the heart of the forest?

Taken from a lecture series given by the esteemed naturalist and sage Oparin, on the subject of dangerous creatures of the woodlands:

The kech is another of the foul fiends that make the woods a dangerous place for inexperienced adventurers and travelers. The physical appearance of the kech is perfectly suited to an arboreal life. Its leathery skin is green, ranging from a light, silvery green similar in hue to the underside of a leaf to the deep green of oak leaves, and this coloration makes it possible for a kech to remain unnoticed in the trees. A kech also possesses long arms and legs, complete with handlike feet, which make it easy for it to move from tree to tree as does a monkey.

Male and female keches are similar in appearance, although the female is smaller and lighter in color. Adult males are 5-6′ in height and weigh 120-150 lbs. Adult females stand upright at 5′ and weigh close to 100 lbs. Both genders are lithe and well muscled, and can walk upright as well as race on all fours. A kech's face is very humanlike (perhaps keches are some accursed offshoot of the human race that became adapted to living in the trees), but the eyes are blood-red in color and pupilless, and the mouth is filled with many blood-letting fangs. Also, the nose of the kech is smaller than a normal human's – almost unnoticeable – and the ears can only be distinguished from the rest of the head by close scrutiny. Although mammalian, a kech has only a few traces of hair on its body.

Keches are wily creatures made infamous by the many snares and traps they set to capture careless and unsuspecting prey, much like those human trappers use to catch the small fur-bearers on which the trappers make their living. These snares are nearly impossible to detect by any but skilled woodsmen and druids.' A kech often covers its hunting territory – an area of indeterminate size which

Illustrations by David Zenz

includes several well-traveled paths, roads, and animal trails – with as many as a half-dozen of these traps. And the more kech found in the same area (for these creatures are commonly found in groups), the larger the hunting area and the greater the number of pitfalls present.[2]

However, keches do not fully rely on the various traps and snares they set to catch all their prey. They actively patrol their hunting areas looking for suitable prey (of the human variety) most of the day and night, resting only in the heat of the day and the middle of the night. Keches never attack a group of four or more individuals unless the group looks particularly weak, unobservant, or careless. If the keches possess two-to-one odds in their favor, they may attack any human gathering. Keches will try to separate larger parties into smaller ones by various means, attacking the smaller parties separately. Their hunting territories are always heavily forested, for keches are excellent climbers and stay in the trees as much as possible.

One of the keches' favorite ways to separate larger groups is to mimic the sounds of a human in trouble – a ploy that some companions and I learned about firsthand during an expedition to investigate these beings. A kech will call for help in a local human tongue, seeking to lure victims into traps and ambushes. These cries are remarkably realistic but can be distinguished from actual human voices by careful listening and attention. While studying these creatures, our party witnessed the death of one of our retainers, who fell into a covered pit when he rushed to aid another retainer whom he believed was screaming in distress. The crier turned out to be one of a pair of keches. While I cannot urge that cries for help be ignored, travelers must use the utmost caution when these creatures are known to be about an area.[3]

Keches can stalk prey silently in the deep forests (although they can still be heard by thieves and elves if an attempt is made to listen closely). In addition, keches are difficult to track as they leave false tracks and use other such ploys to avoid being followed. Because of their leaflike skin and silence, keches often succeed in attacking their victims with surprise.[4] By hiding in the branches of trees, a kech can drop on an opponent from above, knock him off his feet, and bite and claw at him; this is the keches' favorite method of assault.[5] Keches also use their prehensile toes to hang from limbs, using their claws as victims pass underneath. Keches sometimes rush victims on the ground in an effort to kill or disable one or two of them, fleeing with their prey before the victims' allies have a chance to retaliate.

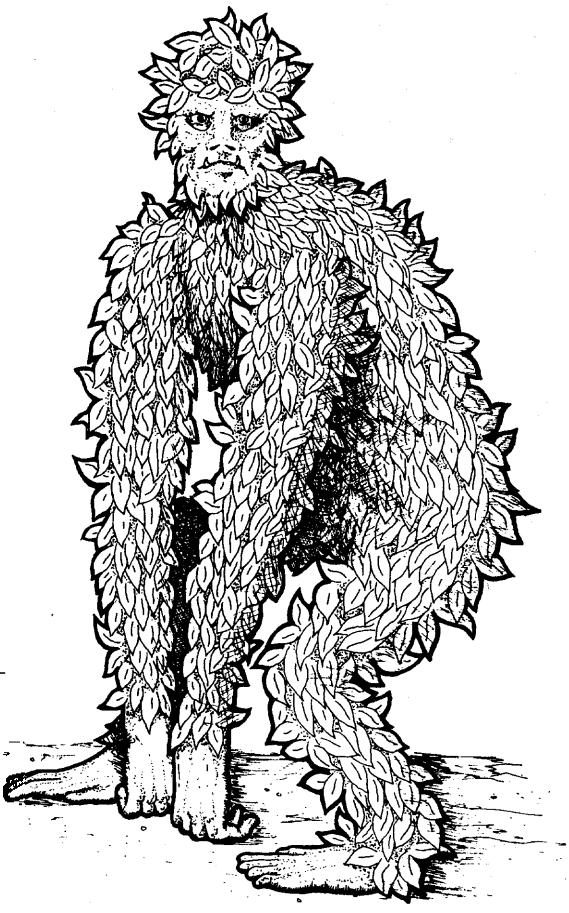
Keches normally choose to disable prey, clawing and biting at the faces and necks of victims rather than killing them outright. This is especially true of attacks against humans, whom kech prefer to torture before killing and devouring.[6] Once an opponent is disabled, the kech moves on to attack another foe, returning to kill the incapacitated one after other victims present are also incapacitated. Keches rarely kill more prey than necessary for survival, but their hatred for humans is so great that they kill as many humans as possible without endangering themselves.

Keches are extremely evil and rapacious creatures who view nearly all other creatures as food – especially humans, whom they seek to kill, maim, and destroy without restraint. The reason for this hatred can only be speculated upon; perhaps it has something to do with man's disregard for the forests or with some ancient feud between man and kech. The only creatures keches are known to associate with are su-monsters. These associations rarely last more than a week or two because of the chaotic nature of the su-monsters, but during this time the number of raids on human settlements nearby increases greatly. Whole villages have been destroyed by the combined might of the two.[7]

Although intelligent, keches hardly ever use tools or weapons of any sort, preferring instead to use subtlety and brute strength to kill prey. Keches speak a language that seems totally incomprehensible to outsiders. The language of the kech is a tongue filled with much chittering and whistling, sounding for all the world like squirrel's chatter. Scholars have spent many years studying captive keches in an effort to understand them, but have managed to translate only a few words thus far. Keches can also speak a few words of Common learned from those they have captured or overheard previously. Being intelligent creatures, keches never continue fighting if the odds turn against them or if they are sorely wounded. They will even flee their lairs if attacked by overwhelming numbers, leaving behind all their treasure.

Small groups of keches sometimes band together for mutual protection and for greater ease in dispatching foes. Such groups are led by the largest male, who decides where the traps are placed and which victims the group attacks. The group contains an equal ratio of females to males, with only a slight male plurality in some cases. These groups infrequently raid forest settlements of humans for victims. These raids are lightning-quick forays in which the keches quickly kill up to a dozen victims and carry them back to their lairs deep in the woods. Because these raids always take place in the depths of the night, it is even harder to avenge those carried away.

The lair of a band of keches is always deep in the forest and surrounded by many traps and places for ambushes. Those foolish enough to follow a kech back to its lair rarely return. The lair itself is a crude structure made of tree limbs lashed together with vines to provide



protection from the elements. Keches remain in the same general area and use the same home for no more than a year; this reduces the chances of both overhunting the surrounding area and being discovered in their lair. The treasure found in a kech lair is gained mainly from that kechs' previous victims and is scattered about the lair along with the bones, clothing, and other belongings of their victims. Keches do not value treasure as such, although they use it in their traps to catch greedy humans.

Keches are not prolific creatures, thankfully. Male and female keches mate about once every three years in the spring; permanent mating pairs are not formed. The young, usually one but sometimes two, are born the following spring. All females help care for the young, but the males provide only protection for them and do not help in any other way. Young keches grow very slowly; it takes 20 to 25 years for them to grow to full size, whereupon they become capable of reproduction themselves. According to the records of several adventurers, no more than four young keches have ever been found in the lair at one time, regardless of the number of adults also present.[8] Keches are long-lived creatures, however, which is one of the few things that saves them from eventual extinction. Females average about 150 years, while males often live to be 175 years old. With age comes cunning and cleverness, making the older keches the most dangerous of all.

In summary, keches can be dangerous

foes, especially for unwary and inexperienced adventurers. Even seasoned adventurers respect these foes for their cunning and cleverness. And it is doubtful they will ever cease to trouble mankind as long as there are forests for them to inhabit.

Footnotes

[1]The snares set by a kech should be treated as those created by the third-level druid spell snare. Also, the other types of traps used by keches are 90% undetectable by most characters. Druids and rangers, however, subtract 5% for each level they have when trying to detect traps set by a kech.

[2]A single kech covers as many as 20 square miles of forest a day when searching for prey. For every other kech in addition to the first, add another 10 square miles of forest covered, though the kech will travel together in a single group and will not cover the whole area every day.

[3] Keches are good mimics, being extensively familiar with the sounds humans in trouble make. Using this talent, they often succeed in luring victims to their deaths. The base chance for a kech to successfully mimic a cry for help is 90% minus 5% per intelligence point of the-victim. If the kech is successful, NPC victims are attracted to the direction of the voice, believing that some human is in trouble. Otherwise, the victim simply hears creature screaming.

[4] Thieves may detect the approach of keches on a successful listening roll; elves have a 15% chance to hear them, and gnomes (so rare that they are often forgotten about, even by sages) have a 20% chance. A kech's base chance of surprise is about 83%, but if the attack takes place at night, it becomes 95% (surprising 19 out of 20 times). The reduction by half of all chances of tracking a kech applies only to those with tracking skills (rangers, barbarians, etc.). All others have only a 10% chance to successfully track a kech.

[5] Unsurprised characters must make a successful dexterity check on 1d20 to avoid being struck by a falling kech, which makes a single "to hit" roll at +2 for the attack. Surprised characters are not allowed a dexterity check. Any character fallen upon is immediately knocked to the ground, with the kech automatically clawing and biting the victim (no "to hit" roll required). In addition, the character must make a saving throw vs. paralyzation or be stunned for 1-2 rounds more; a successful saving throw means the character can scramble back to his feet the following round. Failure also means the character remains prone and is at –4 to hit and damage. The attacker, on the other hand, is at +4 to hit for the number of rounds determined above. This applies only to keches attacking from above and not to keches surprising opponents while on the ground. Falling attacks are made from a height of 5-30'.

[6] Whenever the kech's modified "to hit" roll is four or greater than the number required, or when a natural 20 is rolled, there is a 40% chance the kech has hit its opponent in the face or throat for the following effects (roll 1d20):

1d20	Effect
1-3	Both eyes blinded
4-7	Left eye blinded
8-11	Right eye blinded
12-17	Face hit
18-20	Throat torn open

Blindness caused by an attack is-permanent unless healed by magic. A damaged throat causes the loss of 1-6 hp per round until the blood loss is stopped or until the character dies. A face hit leaves scars that permanently reduce the victim's comeliness by one.

[7] There is a 15% chance that 2d4 sumonsters are also found any encounter with four or more keches.

[8] Kech young are born with 1 HD and are about 1' tall. For every six years following birth, a kech gains 1 HD and grows 1'. Keches with less than 4 HD are agile and fast, but are unable to attack opponents. After that time and until they reach adulthood, they can claw for 1-2 hp damage and bite for 1-4 hp damage. Otherwise, kech young are exactly like adults in appearance and (unless they are less than one year old) have the same innate abilities. There will rarelv be more four young in a kech lair at any one time. Ω

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Illustration by Jim Holloway

The Ecology of the Kappa

Little things should not be taken lightly

by David R. Knowles

From the Complete Bestiary of the Reaches of Kara-Tur, *of which one copy survives in the city of Waterdeep:*

The Kappa

Appearance

Certainly, one of the most bizarre and dangerous of local beasts is the kappa, whose appearance is like that of a tiny, ugly boy with a distended stomach and slippery skin. Often thought to be a type of monkey because of its stance and posture while moving, the kappa is an amphibian with magical powers. An upright kappa stands, on the average, 2′ tall, though a few larger ones have been seen. Female kappa are generally 6″ shorter than males. Both females and males have pot bellies, each with a pouch in the abdomen similar to that of a kangaroo. Their feet look like those of a snapping turtle, having three webbed toes, and their hands are webbed and clawed. Indeed, most kappa are known to have hard shells like those of small turtles [1], and almost all kappa have scaled bodies, though occasionally they have been seen with smooth skin. Their skin is very tough and is normally green, often with yellow tinges, and is clammy, slimy, and cold to the touch because they are cold-blooded. A few are able to change the color of their skin to match their surroundings in the same manner as a chameleon, adjusting to almost any color to enable them to hide or stalk successfully[2].

Clothing irritates their, skin, and they never wear garments, finding them silly and pointless. They have a thick layer of fat under their skin for both buoyancy and warmth, and some kappa have a small amount of body hair. They smell vaguely fishlike. Their boyish heads are fairly chubby and flat.

On the top of each kappa's head is a saucerlike depression filled with water from the kappa's home body of water. This water is the source of that kappa's strength. The kappa will lose vitality and other abilities in proportion to any amount of this water spilled from the bowl in its head, and it will die within minutes if all the water is lost and the kappa is unable to replenish this vital fluid with fresh water from any source (though "home" water is preferred).

Around this bowl, most kappa have hair that is usually cut short, though some scholarly or artistic kappa wear it long. Kappa have large eyes with humanlike tear ducts, and though most have large beaks, some have long noses instead. All kappa are able to breathe comfortably underwater or in air; however, they have only lungs and do not have gills, taking the water in through their mouths. Their lungs filter oxygen out of the water.

There are two types of kappa: the common kappa, which is bad enough, and the vampiric kappa, whose bite drains vitality. The vampiric kappa is usually a solitary creature, preying upon all who fall within its grasp (even other kappa).

Common kappa weigh, on average, approximately 20 lbs. Vampiric kappa usually weigh slightly more. Huge kappa have been known to stand 5′ tall and weigh up to 150 lbs.; these are believed to have once been experimental subjects of a wu jen[3].

Abilities

Kappa are extremely strong despite their small size, and some have been known to wreck bridges, hurl rocks, and tear flesh from their opponents with their clawed hands. Kappa prefer not to use weapons, but they can throw daggers and darts if given the chance.

Kappa have lithe, supple bodies and are fluid movers, allowing them to climb and swim with great ease and grace. This grace, combined with their thick skin, makes them difficult to strike in hand-to-hand combat, adding to the dangers of fighting them in close quarters.

Additionally, each community of kappa has developed its own style of martial arts, and the kappa have become masters of their own styles. Often, these styles are based upon basic wrestling techniques in which the kappa are highly skilled. Kappa martial-arts styles usually contain many grappling moves and maneuvers designed to throw their opponents off balance.

All kappa regenerate wounds that they have received; even their limbs can regrow quickly. Kappa may reconnect severed limbs if they are able to spend time undisturbed to allow their regenerative and recuperative powers to work. They are reputed to be masters of *koppo*, which is the knowledge of bone structures and the art of setting or breaking bones. This art may well be included in the martial combat styles of some kappa[4].

Vampiric kappa differ from their common brethren in a number of ways. They are not undead, but they are more powerful and deadly than their kin. Their eyes are blood red but dead looking, giving little indication of emotion or intent. Their skin is more like hide, being tougher and more resilient than that of normal kappa. They are as strong and powerful as the other types of kappa, but they are more agile and much hardier. This difference in physique and stamina allows vampiric kappa to move nearly as quickly as a human on dry land and gives them excellent endurance. Vampiric kappa are slightly more intelligent than normal kappa; this difference in mental power only worsens the naturally crafty and malicious attitude that kappa seem to harbor.

In addition to normal attacks, vampiric kappa also attack their prey by biting. Once this kappa has successfully bitten its victim, it will lock its jaws and not release until the victim is dead or the kappa is forced to disengage. This bite causes both physical damage and a loss of strength, and may also inflict a dreadful disease that drains strength. This disease lasts approximately six days before killing its carrier.

Folktales tell of spell-casting kappa, but nothing else is known of such matters.[5]

Habitat & Diet

Kappa most often live in rivers but also inhabit deep streams, lakes, and large ponds—almost any suitably large body of fresh water. Kappa die from extended exposure to saltwater, being unable to tolerate it for longer than a few hours". Often making their lairs around rocky outcrops and bridges, they use these areas as solid, defensible bases from which to scavenge. On occasion, these lairs may contain magical items and treasures such as gold and jewelry, all gained from the demise of their victims. In fact, kappa are a major cause of drownings in fresh water in Kara-Tur, as they delight in dragging unsuspecting human and animal victims into their waterways. Kappa can see perfectly underwater, having strong transparent protective coverings over their eyes.

All kappa consider themselves gourmets. They normally live on fish, but they are especially fond of cucumbers and melons such as cantaloupes, muskmelons, and the like. Some kappa have a special taste for fruits such as oranges or grapes, but some hate sweet fruits with a passion. (No one has yet tried to feed pickles to a kappa.) They are also very fond of horse, cow, and human flesh. Their normal method of

eating slain animals is to suck out the entrails of their victims. Kappa have been known to indulge in *sake* (rice wine) or plum brandy; such beverages have been used to bribe even the destructive kappa into temporary truces.

Society

A group of kappa usually has two to six members, though larger groups do exist. What little society kappa share works much as an extended family whose members are bound to one another by social obligations more than by blood. These bonds, however, do not interfere with each kappa's independent, ruthless, and predatory behavior. (Vampiric kappa almost never live in groups, preferring solitude or living with a mate only.)

Courting among kappa is initiated by the females, who chase their chosen males vigorously until the former's advances are accepted. Once established, partnerships are usually permanent. Males outnumber females, though only by a small margin, and the females are equal to the males in their abilities, strengths, and aggressive natures. Young are hatched from tiny eggs that are kept hidden within the pouches of their parents (males, however, sometimes eat the eggs they carry).

Kappa are believed to have a lifespan similar to humans, although they develop their skills and abilities at a younger age in comparison to humans[8]. The most obvious example is that their babies can walk and talk at hatching and very quickly learn to swim well.

Almost all kappa have, even from a very early age, full literacy in their own language and usually in those tongues spoken commonly in their lands. They are able to speak, read, and write with great eloquence in "kappanese," although they are somewhat less capable in other languages. The script of the kappa is very spindly and spiral; it is not aesthetically pleasing but rather is disturbing to the human eye and difficult to read by nonkappa.

As a race; kappa are inventive and clever within their own lifestyle, but they are no more intelligent than human beings, often exhibiting lesser intelligence., As with any intelligent creature, there are exceptions to this, and a few intelligent (even brilliant) kappa have been discovered. These kappa use brain-power to manipulate others to achieve their goals.

Kappa are self-centered and self-motivated to the exclusion of the opinions and ideals of others. One unexpected aspect of their personalities comes to light when they are in trouble or somehow compromised. They fawn on the people who have cornered them, and nothing is too much trouble for a kappa in this situation. Rumors exist of captured, grateful, or indebted kappa teaching some or all of their skills to whomever controlled them. All kappa thoroughly enjoy the pain and discomfort of others and are great practical jokers, especially if the joke ends in disaster for their victims. Kappa sometimes assault lone travelers for no reason other than to cause them misery, greeting the victim with great formality just before the attack. This malicious streak stems from a kappa's complete and utter disregard for anyone or anything else.

Travelers and local inhabitants attempt to appease kappa by throwing food into kappa waters. Village folk write the names of their family members on these gifts so the kappa know who should not be attacked. Another way to pass the lair of a kappa without being attacked is to offer to wrestle the kappa for the right of passage. As all kappa are skilled wrestlers, they will often agree to this. However, if a kappa defeats his opponent, he will almost always drag the victim into his lair to be eaten at his leisure.

Kappa are extremely polite, even to their prey, but they make their intentions well known. If treated with great respect, a kappa might be swayed from slaying and eating its victim, but it will certainly demand immediate payment of money or valuable belongings in return for sparing the victim's life.

Given to such exhibitions of extreme behavior, all kappa regard odd and seemingly meaningless acts as perfectly normal. To a human being, a kappa's lifestyle would appear random, thoughtless, and devoid of almost anything other than self-gratification. This is perfectly true, and kappa not only admit to this but take pride in it. Their rarity is, perhaps, their only blessing.

Footnotes

1. About 10% of all common kappa lack shells, having a base armor class of 3. Such kappa are always solitary, being bullied by other kappa.

2. Assume that 5% of all kappa have this chameleon power, which gives them a 75% chance to hide in natural terrain.

3. Assume that there is a 5% chance that a particular kappa is a huge one; double its hit dice, movement rates, damage (giving it a strength of 19 with huge claws), and height (4-5'). These huge kappa are always solitary and extremely rare. Huge vampiric kappa are, as one would imagine, incredibly dangerous; these specimens drain two strength points per round that they can bite.

4. The special maneuvers Crushing Blow and Eagle Claw come to mind here.

5. Spell-casting ability exists in approximately 10% of all male kappa. Each may cast as many spells per day as a wu jen with as many levels as the kappa has hit dice. For example, a vampiric kappa would be able to cast four first-, three second-, two third-, and one fourth-level wu jen spells. These spells need not be chosen at the beginning of a day, nor do they have to be learned from a scroll or book, since they come from the kappa's elemental sympathy with water. A kappa may cast spells only within one mile of his own waterway. Spells should be chosen as needed. If a kappa has lost any water from the bowl in his head, his spells' durations and effects are reduced by the same degree as the amount of water lost. Spell-casting kappa may choose any spell listed as "Water" or "All" from page 73 of the *Oriental Adventures* tome.

6. Nonvampiric kappa lose 1-4 hp per turn they are immersed in saltwater; vampiric kappa lose only 1 hp per turn. Furthermore, if the water in the bowl on their heads is filled with saltwater, they gain no special strength, though they can still *regenerate* wounds and do not lose 2 hp per round, as per *Oriental Adventures,* page 124.

7. If six individuals are indicated by a die roll, allow a 50% chance that there are another 1-6 individuals present. If another six is rolled, allow another 50% chance for 1-6 more kappa, and so forth.

8. Common kappa typically live to an age of 100 years, and vampiric ones live to 130. From birth, kappa gain 1 HD per year until they reach adulthood.

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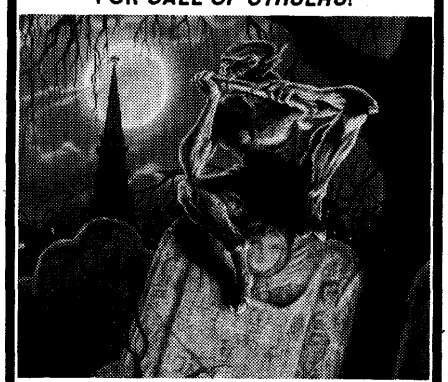

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Illustration by Jim Holloway

The Ecology of the Yuan-ti

They're not merely poisonous—they're venomous

by David Wellman

"It rose out of the muck before me, in the manner of a huge snake readying its strike. Six or seven feet long, it had the lower body and head of a serpent: green scales, wet and glittering in the dim sunlight; a muddied yellow belly; and red eyes that stared with malevolence. But what choked me with revulsion was the human torso and arms between the snake-head and tail. My courage wavered. Then I saw that wrapped tightly around the thing's waist was a belt from which hung the daisho—the katana and wakizashi—in mockery of the status of the samurai. The sight of such a disgrace ripped me from my trance. I drew my grandfather's katana from my hip with a shout. Not even devils themselves could have stopped me then, for I would not allow the rank of samurai to be worn by such as this. . . ."

—From the memoirs of the samurai Hirikito Toshubu, of the Imperial staff.

Hirikito's adversary was a halfbreed yuan-ti, one of three types of the yuan-ti race. Yuan-ti use magic, are magic resistant, and have genius-level intellects, and as such are dangerous foes for even the most well-organized party. The pureblood yuan-ti can easily blend itself into human society, making even large cities possible encounter areas for the yuan-ti.

Although they can be used in an Occidental campaign, yuan-ti fit better within the Oriental milieu. But much more information is needed on their motives and history before the race can be used to its full potential.

The origins of the yuan-ti date to the dawn of man. Ages ago, when mankind took its first tottering steps, there came among men a monstrous corruption known as Sch'theraqpasstt. This god is now a shadow of his former self, driven to both ultimate power and ultimate madness in an insane attempt to become one with the Abyssal plane he ruled.

Evil men, hungry for power and dominion over their kindred, turned to the worship of this dark force. The result, true to the tenets of chaos and evil, was more a curse than a blessing. These men were instructed to gain the venom of the ophidian, a snakelike creature with human arms (see the *Monster Manual II*, page 97). The venom of these creatures transmutes victims into ophidians over a period of several weeks. The ophidian is believed by sages to be a creation of Sch'theraqpasstt, sent to wreak havoc on the Prime Material plane. When its venom is distilled and mixed with other ingredients known only to the yuan-ti, then consecrated to their deity, it becomes what is known to sages as the Black Broth.

The worshipers of Sch'theraqpasstt who first created the Black Broth were also its first imbibers and were willingly transformed into the histachii, progenitors of the yuan-ti race. Among the three types of yuan-ti—pureblood, halfbreed, and abomination—any mating produces only abominations. The pureblood yuan-ti is created in matings of histachii with other histachii, and the matings of histachii with any true yuan-ti produces a halfbreed. Thus, the yuan-ti need a constant supply of humans in order to sustain the race. Such has been the fate of many human captives of the yuan-ti, transformed into the mindless histachii.

The gestation period for yuan-ti young is about 60 months. Approximately 30% of the resulting creatures are so deformed that they die shortly after birth. This gives the yuan-ti a very low growth rate but is counterbalanced by their extremely long lifespans. Pureblood yuan-ti age as do gray elves (AD&D 1st Edition *Dungeon Masters Guide*, page 13). Halfbreeds live twice as long as purebloods, and abominations have a life span three times that of a gray elf, some 6,000 years.

When considering the lifespans and power of the yuan-ti, one might wonder why they do not control the world. In fact, they once held a great empire that spanned much of the southern jungles of Kara-Tur. In forgotten corners of the land, crumbling basalt temples stand in mute testament to their once far-reaching grasp. Then came the fall of Sch'theraqpasstt.

The god's schemes were his undoing, and he was reduced to the operational level of a major demon. His clerics (humans, as yuan-ti cannot be any class) found themselves without spell abilities and thus unable to complete the consecration of the Black Broth. The yuan-ti empire was thrown into chaos. The forces of good took the chance to destroy the yuan-ti empire, which they did to such an extent that the race of yuan-ti was very nearly wiped from existence.

The few surviving yuan-ti dispersed, turning to other evil beings from the Abyss for aid. They gained little, as no other deity could successfully aid them in their quest to create the Black Broth. Eventually, they discovered the true fate of their god and therein the salvation of their race. At times when the stars and planets are in a specific alignment, signaling the conjunction of Sch'theraqpasstt's plane and the Prime Material plane, the yuan-ti may draw directly upon the energy of that plane and complete the Black Broth. Although this saved the yuan-ti from degenerating into a race of abominations, it did not mark their return to power. The conjunction of the planes needed to complete the Black Broth comes but once a millennium.

This is the current situation of the yuan-ti: small numbers, an erratic breeding cycle, and a 1,000-year wait between breeding periods for two-thirds of the race. Although abominations may still be created without difficulty, the yuan-ti limit their birth rate to avoid gaining the attention of the forces of good before they discover a more stable method of continuing their race. Population inequities result, of course; each yuan-ti encountered has a 70% chance of being an abomination, a 20% chance of being a halfbreed, and a 10% chance of being a pureblood (but only purebloods travel among men).

Yuan-ti temples are usually huge basalt edifices with no windows and only one entrance. The walls are carved with revolting scenes involving yuan-ti, humans, and unspeakable creatures from the outer planes. Even abandoned ruins are places of great evil and are almost always infested with foul monsters. Torture of helpless subjects is a favorite pastime of the yuan-ti, and implements of torture are easily found in their places of worship.

They will sometimes enslave humans, and such slaves will usually be crippled or maimed, thanks to the mercies of their captors. Yuan-ti do not forget their downfall at the hands of good forces, and any good-aligned character caught in their clutches are often tortured long and lavishly before death, unless they fall victim to the Black Broth.

Yuan-ti have no holy days or festivals except for the Night of Venom once every 1,000 years. This is the conjunction that allows the completion of the Black Broth. Beginning about a year before the Night, the yuan-ti become increasingly active. They create as much of the Broth as possible and raid human settlements to kidnap victims for the rite. Any single group of yuan-ti will create 20-200 histachii on the Night of Venom. The forces of good, however, have found these occasions excellent times to destroy large numbers of yuan-ti, and most of the ceremonies are broken up before they are completed. Still, it is rumored that in some evil-infested swamps these creatures thrive in small cities and aspire to regain their former dominance.

Yuan-ti build dwellings both above and below ground, and their temples are known for mazes of tunnels and dungeon chambers. Their lodgings usually consist of squat stone buildings (normally of volcanic rock), each with 2-5 rooms and an underground chamber. In yuan-ti communities, these underground chambers are connected to each other and to underground meeting places, throne rooms, treasuries, etc. Even a small yuan-ti village has an extensive underground layout.

Any yuan-ti community will be ruled by the strongest abomination in the community. This creature's basic duties are to settle disputes, oversee the protection of the community, and regulate the activities of that community's purebloods in the human world. Even though yuan-ti are chaotic evil, they are extremely intelligent. As they do not wish to further reduce their population, physical combat is rare among the yuan-ti. Instead, many disputes are settled by weaponless combat that can easily be stopped short of fatality.

When attacked, yuan-ti are capable of a high degree of organization, especially if a community is threatened. Those able to cast spells will use *sticks to snakes* and *darkness* to hold off attackers, *cause fear* to split a weakened group, then *suggestion* and *polymorph* other before engaging in melee. Magical weapons will most certainly be used if available. The yuan-ti will know the properties of any miscellaneous magical items they possess and will use them if possible.

Yuan-ti will often cooperate with other evil creatures as long as such cooperation will further their own ends. Ophidians are found 70% of the time in yuan-ti communities and are highly valued for their venom. Some yuan-ti have been known to use traps poisoned with ophidian venom. Characters wounded by these must save vs. poison at +2 or be affected as if they have been bitten by ophidians. Yuan-ti have been known to work with nagas, kappas, bajang, and evil dragons, and they are rarely the losers in such partnerships.

In playing yuan-ti, the DM must remember that these are highly intelligent, powerful, evil creatures with a goal of world domination. They do not involve themselves in petty affairs, nor do they deal lightly with those who interfere with their plans. Yuan-ti do not forget such interference, even throughout their long lifespans. They treat revenge as they treat torture—it should be long, lavish, and painful.

Sch'theraqpasstt
(Major demon)

FREQUENCY: *Unique*
NO. APPEARING: *1*
ARMOR CLASS: *-4*
MOVE: *12"/36" (MC: C)*
HIT DICE: *111 hp (attacks as 16 + HD monster)*
% IN LAIR: *Nil*
TREASURE TYPE: *Nil*
NO. OF ATTACKS: *1 bite and 2 constriction*
DAMAGE/ATTACK: *2-12/3-30*
SPECIAL ATTACKS: *Poisonous bite, continuous damage, insanity aura*
SPECIAL DEFENSES: *+2 or better weapon needed to hit, immune to mind-affecting spells, psionics, and illusions*
MAGIC RESISTANCE: *50%*
INTELLIGENCE: *Supragenius (insane; see below)*
ALIGNMENT: *Chaotic evil*
SIZE: *L (60' long)*
PSIONIC ABILITY: *Nil*

Sch'theraqpasstt (pronounced schik-there-AUK-past) was once a lesser god that ruled the 111th plane of the Abyss, and from there orchestrated the creation of the yuan-ti ages ago. However, he was not satisfied with being "simply" a god, and he devised a method to gain ultimate power. Sch'theraqpasstt attempted to merge his life-essence with the plane he ruled and become, in effect, a living dimension.

His scheme destroyed him by giving him what he wanted. He succeeded in merging with his plane of the Abyss, but no intellect, no matter how powerful, could stand the strain of being joined with pure Chaos. All but a minute portion of his psyche went insane; with what little of his mind was left, he formed the body described herein, a shadow of his former self.

This manifestation appears as a 60'-long, winged, ebony serpent. The attack modes are bite and, constriction. Those bitten take 2-12 hp damage and must save versus poison at -4 or contract a form of insanity. Such insanity can be cured with a *heal*, wish, limited wish or alter reality spell. Constriction causes 3-30 hp damage, and such damage is automatic every round after the first hit. Sch'theraqpasstt can constrict up to six small-size, four man-size, or two large-size creatures per round.

A +2 or better weapon is needed to hit Sch'theraqpasstt, and in addition to his magic resistance, he is immune to all mind-affecting spells (including illusions). All beings within 100' of Sch'theraqpasstt must save at the beginning of every round or be affected as per a *scarab of insanity*.

Sch'theraqpasstt flits through the multiverse in a random fashion, rarely staying in one place for more than one turn. He has been seen on the Prime Material plane several times and will always be there on the Night of Venom, usually where the greatest number of yuan-ti are singing his praises. At this time he will be somewhat rational, but at other times there is a 10% chance per round that his intelligence will slip from supragenius to complete idiocy. If Sch'theraqpasstt goes insane during a battle, he fights to the death, with + 2 on all to-hit, damage, and saving rolls, and a -2 penalty to his opponents' saves vs. his poison and magical effects.

If Sch'theraqpasstt's material form is killed, his psyche returns to his home plane of the Abyss and reforms over a period of 111 days. The only way to truly destroy this being is to destroy his entire plane. Thus, at the price of his godhood and sanity, Sch'theraqpasstt attained an indestructible immortality.

This being's home plane is known as "The Mind of Evil." The only activity there is the chaotic whirling of an intelligent, insane plane. Anyone transported here is at the mercy of Sch'theraqpasstt and, as magic does not work here, has almost no chance of survival. Note that all planar travelers are aware of this peril and avoid that layer of the Abyss at all costs.

Part of the yuan-ti plan after conquering the world is to gather all the magic they can find and use it to reverse the downfall of their god. Whether this can be achieved is unknown, but there are few persons outside yuan-ti society who wish to see this come about.

Histachii

FREQUENCY: *Very rare (found only every 1,000 years)*
NO. APPEARING: *See below*
ARMOR CLASS: *8*
MOVE: *12"*
HIT DICE: *2 + 2*
% IN LAIR: *100%*
TREASURE TYPE: *None*
NO. OF ATTACKS: *2 claws and 1 bite*
DAMAGE/ATTACK: *1-2/1-2/1-3*
SPECIAL ATTACKS: *Berserk attack for +2 to hit*
SPECIAL DEFENSES: *Immune to psionics and mind-affecting spells*
MAGIC RESISTANCE: *Standard*
INTELLIGENCE: *Low (insane)*
ALIGNMENT: *Chaotic evil*
SIZE: *M*
PSIONIC ABILITY: *Nil*

"The histachii inspired me with nothing less than revulsion. It had once been human, but now its skin was a mottled yellow, stretched taut over bone and muscle. Much of its hair had fallen out, and what was left was greasy and matted. The nails had become claws extending out from the fingertips and the teeth were sharply pointed. But the worst were the eyes, black pits of nothingness that spoke of the maelstrom of madness that whirled behind them. The thing drooled and gibbered, casting about in its chains for something to rend. . . ."

—From the library of Hodukuri the sage.

Histachii are the final product of the Black Broth, the baby factories for pureblood and halfbreed yuan-ti. The transformation they undergo takes 7-12 days, is excruciatingly painful, and drives the formerly human imbiber insane. Histachii attack any nonreptilian being they encounter but will obey any yuan-ti within speaking range.

Histachii have a lifespan of 20-80 years after their creation, and their lives are devoted to breeding more yuan-ti. Some have posed the question of why the yuan-ti do not simply forget about purebloods and halfbreeds and rely soley on abominations, which can be produced without histachii. The answer lies in the goals of the yuan-ti as a race. The yuan-ti wish to control the world as they almost did ages ago. To allow degeneration of the race into nothing but abominations would hinder this goal. No longer would there be purebloods and halfbreeds to infiltrate human society and corrupt from within; they would only have brute force and mass warfare as their options. Considering the levels of power humans and other races may attain, they see no sure or easy victory in that path. They prefer to subtly sow the seeds of chaos, and once foundations are undermined, they strike.

Histachii are only encountered in the time immediately following the creation of Black Broth. Any human prisoners are subjected to the Black Broth's effects at that time; large groups of yuan-ti may have 20-200 prisoners, but small groups may have 2-20.

The Black Broth

Ingredients:
- venom of an ophidian
- The egg of an amphisbaena
- 12 drops of yuan-ti blood
- 12 drops of human blood
- Petals and seeds of a withered sunflower
- The eyes of 100 normal dragonflies
- Powdered bloodstone (not less than 250 gp worth)
- *Potion of human control*
- A quantity of peat and human hair

Procedure: First, a fire pit is dug and filled with peat. The human hair is wrapped about a stick, lit, and laid in the peat. A *sticks to snakes* spell is cast to turn the stick into a snake, which writhes burning through the peat and sets it alight. Over this fire, the ophidian venom is distilled to a syrupy black liquid. Another container is lined with the sunflower petals and seeds, which are in turn coated with the contents of the amphisbaena egg. This coating is accomplished by a yuan-ti crushing the egg in its hands and lightly spreading it over the petals and seeds. The powdered gemstone is then added to this mixture, while the dragonfly eyes are added to the boiling venom. After the eyes have been mixed in, this substance is poured into the other container. As soon as this is accomplished, the blood is added, drop by drop, alternating types with each drop, and a *polymorph other* spell is cast upon the entire mixture. Finally, at the consecration, the priest imbibes the ***potion of human control*** and performs the blessing. The Black Broth is now complete.

In response to their desires for power, Sch'theraqpasstt gave to his followers the formula to create the Black Broth. The result, much to the woe of the world, was the introduction of the race called yuan-ti to the world. In the beginning, it was intended that the Black Broth would create histachii, who would create purebloods, who in turn would create halfbreeds and finally the end product, abominations. But in light of their fall from power, halfbreeds and especially purebloods were deemed necessary in their schemes to regain domination. Purebloods could infiltrate the world of humans. Human-headed halfbreeds would become the priests, snake-headed halfbreeds the temple guards and warriors, and the abominations would be the rulers. With the aid of the Black Broth, the histachii became the foul reproductive arm of the race.

Any nonhuman who drinks the Black Broth must save vs. poison at -4 or die. Those who save will be violently ill and helpless for 1-4 turns. Any creature drinking an uncompleted version of the potion (i.e., before its consecration on the Night of Venom) must save vs. poison at normal chances or suffer the same fate.

Any human drinking the completed Black Broth must make a save vs. poison at -4. If the save is successful, the drinker dies. If the save is failed, the victim will become a histachii in 7-12 days. (Anyone dying from the Black Broth can be saved normally with a *slow poison* or ***neutralize*** poison. Since spell-casting yuan-ti possess the ***neutralize poison*** spell, a human dying on the Night of Venom may find himself alive again, only to face another draught of the foul potion.)

Once a human begins the process of transformation, few methods may be used to save him. ***Neutralize poison, dispel magic, remove curse,*** and heal spells will reverse the process but must be cast consecutively and in that order. The victim will lose one point of intelligence; a ***wish, limited wish,*** or ***after reality*** will save the victim with no loss of intelligence. Once the transformation is complete, only a ***wish*** will restore the victim.

Adventurers have asked why the yuan-ti do not simply consecrate an ocean of the substance on the Night of Venom. The problem is that the Black Broth is unstable. Once created, it must be consecrated within a week or the effort is wasted. Even consecration does little to add to its stability; after two weeks, it simply becomes a poison equal to what it was before consecration.

A further question is why no other being's power can consecrate the formula and attain the same effect. The sage Hodukuri speculates that Sch'theraqpasstt decreed that only his blessings would activate the formula. Although his power is now far reduced, it still exists and the godly declaration is still empowered. If that power were destroyed, continued Hodukuri, there are two possible outcomes: The formula might be freed for any to empower, or it may be rendered useless for all eternity. Ω

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The Ecology of the Umber Hulk

A three-quarter-ton rock drill with a bad temper

by Tony Jones

The following was taken from Creatures of the Earth's Deeps, ***by the sage and wizard Archmyel:***

The umber hulk is one of the more powerful and dangerous underground denizens. Although only infrequently encountered, umber hulks have become well known because of their distinctive appearance and the ferocity of their attacks on adventurers. I have heard numerous stories of small bands of umber hulks destroying larger parties of experienced adventurers, leaving nothing but dropped weapons and debris behind.

Umber hulks are extremely large, bulky creatures often standing nearly three yards tall and over one and a half yards wide. Their powerful arms end in hands with claws like iron that are capable of ripping through solid stone quickly. The rest of their stout bodies are very muscular, but because of their weight (1,500-1,750 lbs.) and size, umber hulks are slow, awkward creatures. Such a creature's mouth is filled with many small teeth, but the major damage is inflicted by the umber hulks two sets of mandibles.

In addition, the umber hulk has two sets of eyes, one on the outside of its flat head and the other in the middle of its forehead. The eyes on the outside of its head are white with black irises, while those on its forehead are purple with yellow or amber irises. The creature lacks a nose but breathes through gill-like structures on its almost nonexistent neck, evidence of a possible previous aquatic existence. It can thus eat and breathe at the same time. The color of the umber hulk's tough hide is black but lightens to a grayish or burnt brown hue on the head and front. The mandibles and claws are ivory colored. Adventurers have been known to mistake umber hulks for some other type of creature at a distance of 15 yards or more because of their dark coloring.

Umber hulks are, as noted earlier, well known for their ferocious attacks on adventurers—particularly humans, which are relished.. Using their powerful claws and great strength to rend opponents, they have been known to kill with a single attack, literally ripping their foes in two. These monsters usually prey on other subterranean creatures like anhkhegs and small purple worms, against which the umber hulks developed their powerful offensive array. It is said that umber hulks allow themselves to be swallowed alive by great purple worms for the thrill of "tunneling out" and slaying the worms.

Umber hulks use their great claws and strength to good advantage in the subterranean areas they haunt. The area surrounding an umber hulk's underground lair is crisscrossed with numerous tunnels, making it difficult for other creatures to find the lair itself. Some of the tunnels are dead ends, while others lead back to their points of origin in very roundabout fashion. All such tunnels are well known to the umber hulk, which uses these passages to catch victims by outflanking them.

The reverse also holds true, as the umber hulk can use its many tunnels to elude determined pursuit. While it is not impossible to hunt down a fleeing umber hulk, it is difficult even for experienced trackers such as rangers to do so as it leaves few tracks on rocky floors. The umber hulk also could lead pursuers around in circles long enough for others to join it and turn the tables on its hunters. In dire circumstance, an umber hulk will go to an area with a deliberately weakened ceiling, so it may cause a cave-in and later escape. Deliberately caused floods are also possible, as the umber hulk can breathe water for short periods (up to 10 minutes).

Umber hulks are very destructive creatures that will always attempt to destroy what they cannot use. Thus, any clothing found in the lair will be shredded, armor torn and dented, weapons broken and useless. Umber hulks are wanton killers whose courage is not always overcome by self-preservation. They will almost immediately attack any creature they deem weaker than themselves. Only the sight of gold or platinum, in very large amounts, will halt their attacks once begun.

The most dangerous aspect of the umber hulk is its two sets of eyes. Should any creature of even slight intelligence meet the direct gaze of an umber hulk, it becomes instantly befuddled, often attacking its companions or standing dazed as the creature advances. This "gaze of confusion" is magical in nature and is constantly in effect. Other umber hulks are immune to the effects, which affect the victim's brain through the optic nerve in a manner which I have yet to discover. The effect seems to be created by the pair of eyes in the forehead, for the vodyanoi, the umber hulk's marine cousin, lacks this set of eyes and the peculiar gaze. The victim recovers shortly, usually within a few minutes, unless the monster has eaten him.

Both male and female umber hulks appear the same externally, equal in size and ferocity. However, female umber hulks are much rarer than the male, with only one umber hulk in four being female. For this reason, the males are very protective of the females, often sacrificing their own lives in the females' defense.

Little is known about how umber hulks reproduce. The female bears her young live a year after mating, producing one to three "hulklings." The young are quickly able to move about and defend themselves, developing all of their special powers with great rapidity. The mother is especially dangerous during this time, as she will hunt down and kill as much food as possible to feed her young, who eat voraciously. After two years, the young umber hulks learn to hunt at their mother's side. Those that have survived this long are considered mature adults in every respect. After a few months more, the young leave, and the mother may start another litter. Male umber hulks live an average of 50 years; females, 75 years.

Like most underground creatures, umber hulks have more highly developed senses of smell and hearing than eyesight, and they use the former two senses when searching for prey, tracking and fighting without penalty for darkness. However, their eyesight is not bad, and umber hulks have no trouble seeing prey at normal distances. Like most underground creatures, umber hulks dislike bright light, but they suffer ill effects only from the brightest sources. Umber hulks venture above ground only at night and only when des-

perate for prey.

Umber hulks are reasonably intelligent creatures and have developed their own spoken tongue. The language is fairly easy to learn and understand as it conveys only limited information, but only magical intervention ***(clairaudience*** or spying while ***invisible)*** permits anyone to hear the language used. However, "Hulkish" is difficult to actually speak as umber hulks make some sounds that are impossible for humans to duplicate. It is a very direct, concrete, brutal tongue as befits their nature. The umber hulk also uses various grunts, hisses, and gestures for added emphasis when speaking, as well as mouth, mandible, and eye movements.

Though umber hulks are basically loners, they will sometimes cooperate with other evil creatures, including evil humans, if paid in gold and platinum or, possibly, human victims. They will serve in any capacity—as guards, part of a main attack force, even as manual labor—as long as they receive their gold and are not expected to risk their own lives in vain. They will not venture above ground for any price and are therefore of limited use. Their fickle nature causes them to turn on their "masters," often for no reason.

This begs the question, of course, of what umber hulks do with their monetary gains. No one knows, though not all umber hulks seem to value precious metals. It may be that they use their gains as part of their economy, if the rumors of their cities beneath the earth are true, or it may be that the umber hulks consume such metals for dietary reasons (finding coins to be excellent gizzard stones). None can say.

The lair of an umber hulk is a large, spacious cavern or room, the walls of which are always covered by marks from the umber hulk honing its claws or possibly from having carved the cave from the stone itself. Attached to the large cavern are numerous smaller rooms of storage for what few personal items, such as treasure and food, such monsters accumulate. All the rooms will be littered with the remains of previous victims brought here for leisurely consumption. The treasure cave is usually hidden by rocks and debris, with simple but deadly traps such as rockslides. Small items can be found scattered throughout all rooms—curios that caught the monster's interest, such as peculiar gems or devices from a past victim.

Dead umber hulks (the only good ones, some say) have numerous uses. The hide of an umber hulk is extremely tough and damage resistant. Some underground races, notably kobolds and goblins, cure the hides of umber hulks and make armors and shields out of them. (Although they would not dare to attack a living umber hulk, these races recover their prizes from beasts slain by disease, age, or adventurers.) The hard mandibles are

Illustration by Thomas Baxa

used as hand-held weapons, and the claws are turned into spiked clubs and maces. The eyes from the forehead are often needed by magic-users for potions and magical inks, and they can be sold for a profit to alchemical shops or wizards' guilds.

Though it poses little threat to normal human existence, the umber hulk is a notable danger to those who venture beneath the earth in search of adventure and riches. It makes the life of a farmer much more attractive.

Gaming notes

Most umber hulks have strengths of 19, equal to a hill giant, but one in 20 has a strength of 20 and does 1d6 + 6 hp damage with each claw, rather than the 3d4 hp damage listed in the ***Monstrous Compendium.*** If the umber hulk's strength should be reduced, claw damage should be reduced accordingly. Damage done by the mandibles remains the same.

The effects of an umber hulk's gaze are like the effects of a ***confusion*** spell lasting 3d4 rounds, affecting as many victims as are looking at it within 40' of its front. Umber hulks themselves are immune to the effects of the gaze, as are vodyanoi, creatures already suffering from ***confusion,*** and ***mind-barred*** victims. Use the following chart (from the description of the dracolisk in the ***Monster Manual II,*** page 55) to determine the chances of meeting an umber hulk's gaze:

Character is—	Chance to meet gaze
Surprised	7 in 10
Viewing monster	3 in 10
Attacking normally	3 in 10
Avoiding gaze	1 in 10

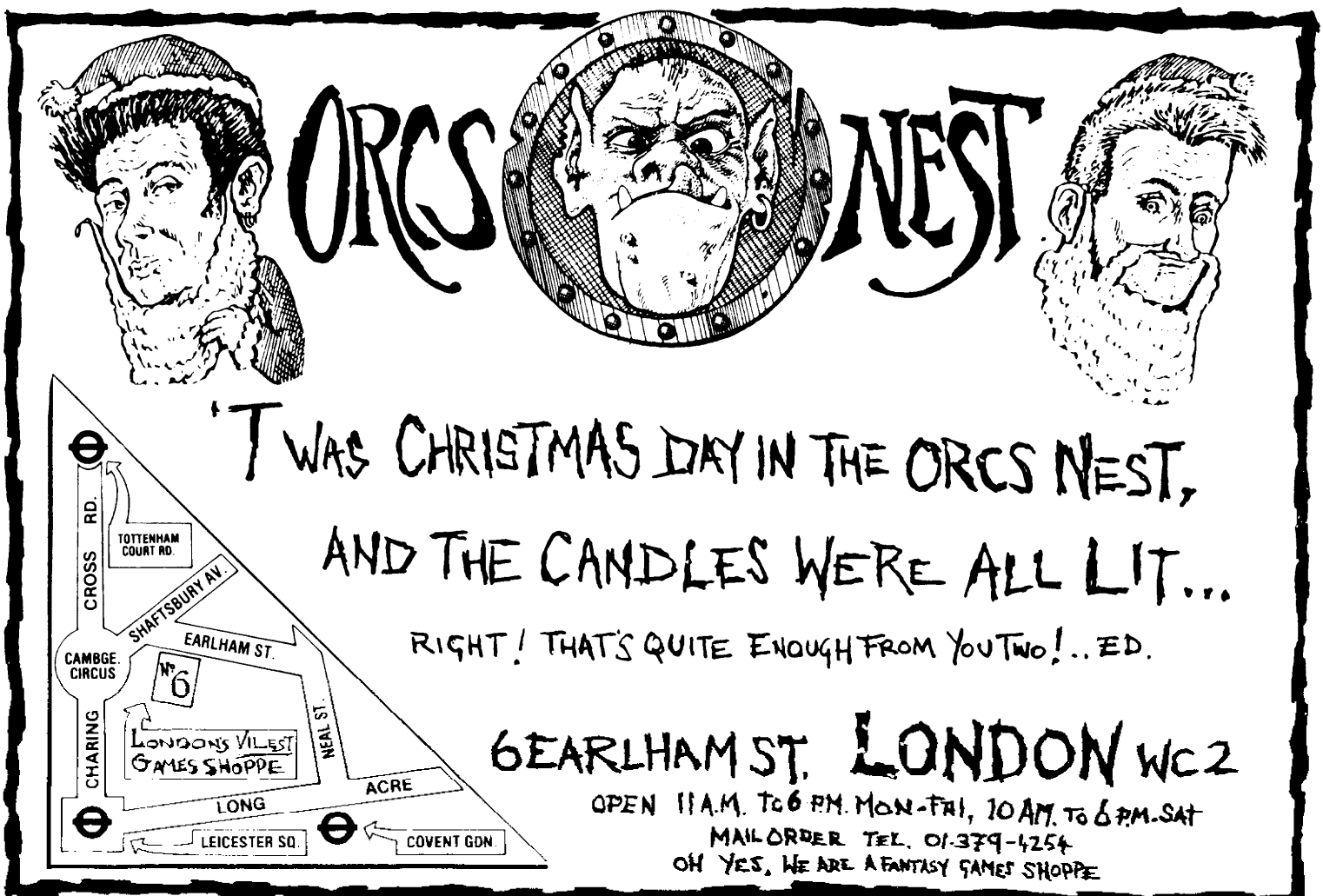
When born, umber hulks are helpless, but by three months of age they have 1 + 1 HD, are 1' tall, and do 1d4/1d4/1d2 hp damage with claws and mandibles. They grow thereafter at the rate shown in the Umber Hulk Growth Table.

Extremely bright light, such as sunlight, causes the umber hulk to take a - 1 penalty to hit and to saving throws.

The claws and mandibles of dead umber hulks do 1d4 hp damage per blow when used as weapons. Armor made from the hides of umber hulks is AC 4 and resembles a suit of plate armor. The eyes from the forehead can be worth 100-400 gp apiece to the right people. Ω

Umber Hulk Growth Table

Age	Hit dice	Claw damage	Mandible damage	Duration in rounds of ***confusion*** gaze
0-2 mo.	1 - 1	-	-	-
3-5 mo.	1+1	1d4	1d2	1d4
6-8 mo.	2+2	1d4	1d3	1d4
9-11 mo.	3+3	1d6	1d4	1d4
12-14 mo.	4+4	2d4	1d6	2d4
15-17 mo.	5+5	2d4	1d6	2d4
18-20 mo.	6+6	2d6	1d8	2d4
21-23 mo.	7+7	2d6	1d10	2d4
24 + mo.	8+8	3d4	1d10	3d4



The Ecology of the Satyr

Taking a light look at Mr. Fun himself

by Gordon R. Menzies

Art by Martin Cannon

The sounds of fighting drifted over the rolling, grassv hills, urged on by a playful wind. Adalia jerked her head in the direction of the noise; her long, thick braid flew off her shoulder and thumped heavily on her back. She was certain she heard it this time. No clang of steel on steel rang out, but the shouts and grunts common to any conflict were unmistakable. There were other sounds, too—husky voices that urged the combatants on. "Marsena, do you hear it?" she asked, breathless.

Marsena, the elder of the two and in her seventeenth year, had obviously heard the noises as well. She stared into the distance with wide eyes, her hands trembling as they clutched at her wooden crook. Like her sister, she was dressed in plain brown homespun, with her feet and shins protected by knee-high leather boots, as was typical of her calling as a shepherdess. "They could be robbers, Adalia, she whispered hoarsely. She looked away to see their flock drifting across the far hill. The sheep were moving steadily away from the sounds of the conflict but were at least not in a panic. Their two dogs, Coran and Pip, pranced around the dirty puffs of white, hedging them in but not impeding their progress.

"Let's go after the sheep," Marsena finished. "And then let's get out of here,"

"No! Let's go investigate—it might be a troop of elves!"

"Don't be silly! They aren't elves. . . ."

The words died on her lips as the same teasing wind that had carried the sounds of the fighting now brought a sweet strain of music to their ears. It was a quick, lilting little melody that rolled about the grass and tumbled down the hills. Marsena found herself wanting to dance after it, and a childlike smile crossed her lips before she could contain herself.

Perhaps these were elves . . .

The sounds of fighting continued but the music didn't stop. Instead the two moved together and merged, each complementing the other, each urging the other to an even sharper intensity. Maybe the noise was coming from a group of practicing acrobats and performers. Yes, that was it. Marsena could see their gaily colored tents even now in her mind.

Adalia's eyes were aglow with excitement. The 14-year-old had dropped her crook and was already hurrying across the green, dogs and sheep forgotten.

Marsena dropped her crook as well. "Adalia! No!" And her feet carried her swiftly after her sister—and toward the music and the gaily colored tents. . . .

Clack! The heads of the two combatants came crashing together, their horns locking for an instant. Horns! thought Marsena. ***They aren't elves or men at all!*** Stranger still, their lower portions were so very goatlike that it caused Adalia to gasp upon seeing them. From their hiding spot, the girls could see at least a dozen of the creatures. Most were capering about, drinking and shouting, either urging on the two who were fighting or else laughing at their efforts. One creature, his fur the purest white, was playing animatedly on a set of reed pipes, the source of the strange and wonderful music.

The two combatants circled one another as the girls looked on, then the larger stood his ground. He was a huge brute with black flanks, knotted muscles, and a close-cropped beard. Grinning at the younger, leaner creature who circled him looking for an opening, he laughed and caught the wineskin another had tossed him, and he drew a great mouthful. The younger leapt at him then, grasping him about the waist with strong arms, but the youth was in turn seized and lifted right off his hooves. He landed in a heap before the larger creature, who now sprayed the fallen one with the wine he had retained in his mouth.

The entire gathering roared with laughter, slapping their knees and clutching at their sides. The loser slunk away but returned almost immediately. His head lowered in respect, he knelt before the larger and offered him a newly crafted cudgel. For his effort, the weapon was accepted and he received a cuff on the shoulder that knocked him off his hooves again. Strangely though, he was smiling when he got up. The music began anew.

Marsena wanted to dance like she had never wanted to before, but even now faithful Coran was pulling on her clothing, her dress in his teeth, breaking the spell. Before the creatures caught sight of them, she dragged the younger girl away to tell the villagers what they had seen.

From "The Wildlands As I Remember Them," from the memoirs of Marsena Crostman, mayor of Arkright:

Satyrs are magical creatures whose upper bodies are almost perfectly human, except for their exceptional brawniness, their long ears, and the presence of two small horns on their foreheads. The lower body of a satyr is goatlike, the fur of which is generally a shade of brown or red but has been known to be black. Rare examples of white fur have also been recorded. Regardless of its coloring, the fur always matches that on the rest of the body. The horns and hooves are always jet black. The upper body, aside from being muscular, is also very hairy, and to satyrs beards are commonplace—the mark of an adult among the members of the race. Satyrs value their beards almost as much as dwarves, but beards never denote social status. Goatees are frequently worn. The faces of satyrs are quite handsome.

Most satyrs roam the woods and meadowlands in small, lusty bands[1], carousing and wenching wherever and whenever they can. They are overly fond of music and drink; it is a sad satyr who cannot carry a tune or hold his own in a drinking bout. Typical examples of the race will carry some sort of wind instrument and a wineskin before they even think of carrying a weapon. Of course, their ability to butt with their horns almost precludes this need.

There are no females of the race. Satyrs are born of a union between satyrs and dryads. Although satyrs frequently enjoy the company of females from other races (especially lonely human shepherdesses), for some reason the incidents of half-satyrs are extremely rare. This is good, for the typical satyr attempts to woo just about every female he meets.[2]

Little is known of the youngest years of a satyr[3], though they often recall being extremely shy as children (and just as powerfully inquisitive about their forest world). An adolescent satyr will generally seek out his father's band, and if he finds it or any other such band, the youngster is always accepted, having proved himself worthy simply by surviving. He will grow and mature quickly after this, being considered an adult and full member of the band at the age of 15 or so.

Obviously, given the male-dominated society satyrs live in, with no positive feminine influence save for those first years, they are always gruff, masculine creatures. They hide their true emotions,

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though they tend to be quite outgoing[4]. Satyrs don't understand male-female love beyond its physical aspect, and marriage is a totally alien concept to them—they are forever bachelors. No satyr could hope to restrain himself from the charms of a new female that happened along.

Relationships with other males are quite another thing. The physically strongest satyr in any band is always the leader[5]; druidic types[6] never rise beyond the title of "advisor," and even then they are rarely consulted, despite the respect the rest of the band holds for them (it is considered a sign of weakness in a leader to seek too much advice or magical assistance). The leader of the band has no verbal title to which he is referred, save when the band is dealing with other races. In this case, he would be given the title "Chief."

A leader reigns in one-year spans, renewed or lost each spring in a special ceremony known to the satyr as the Rutt. Basically, the Rutt is a trial of elimination through bare-handed combat among all mature members of the group. Satyrs consider the use of their horns legal in this contest. The battles are never to the death, as the intent is to humble the loser and acknowledge the superiority of the winner. Eventually, the overall leader is established and given homage by all, in the form of food and drink, musical instruments, weapons, and similar gifts a satyr would consider useful. The leader is also given first choice of all willing females the band comes across.

This type of conditioning affects the satyr beyond his natural social group. To entice a satyr to join a party of male adventurers, the respect that the satyr associates with friendship must first be established. This is done in only one way—the prospective "friends" must be battled to determine dominance (friendship will occur, all other things being equal, no matter who wins). However, if the satyr wins, he will expect to be considered superior to his friends in all ways, and he will want to make all the decisions for the group. Thus, a satyr will always consider himself better or worse than everyone else, fighting everyone he meets to establish this. Magic is disdained during such contests as much as is the use of weapons, as both are considered to be the mark of a coward. As during the Rutt, satyrs will not fight to the death during such battles. A party's alliance with a satyr will always be a rough-and-tumble experience at first.

Female humans, elves, and the like have an even more difficult time with satyrs, as they are considered good for one thing and one thing only. A female who cannot defend herself, or one who isn't obviously the partner of another male, will be courted tenaciously. The satyr will sing and play for her, vigorously proclaiming his love for her, though he would offer his affections just as copiously to any other female who happened by. Male defenders of a lady's honor will be battled to determine dominance, with the winner having the "right" to woo the female. Satyrs are completely unable to conceive of this as being wrong. Females who manage to put off the satyr's overtures are forever considered honorary males, as a "real woman" couldn't possibly turn the satyr down. This putting off may take some time, as every satyr considers himself a Casanova and will certainly be a problem in the meantime.

All satyrs are musically inclined, and many make their own "Pan pipes" from local materials. But once in a while, a satyr will craft and master a set of magical pipes[7]; the one who does soon rises to an exalted position within his band, though his chance at seizing leadership is no greater than others (resorting to the use of the pipes during the Rutt would brand him a coward). These magical pipes are known to cause listeners to fall asleep, be seized with fear, or to become entranced should certain melodies be played on them, but even without these effects, satyrs find the pipes useful in wooing women, making friends with other sylvan creatures, and threatening their enemies. A satyr lucky enough to craft a set of these magical pipes may never possess more than one, nor can he craft another for someone else. The construction of a set of pipes (magical or otherwise) takes a full week, wherein no other activities save the basic functions of living can be pursued. If lost or destroyed, another set may be made, but under these conditions only. No more than one satyr in any band will possess and be able to employ the magic pipes. If another happens to gain the ability, he goes off on his own to seek another "pipeless" band, into which he will always be happily accepted.

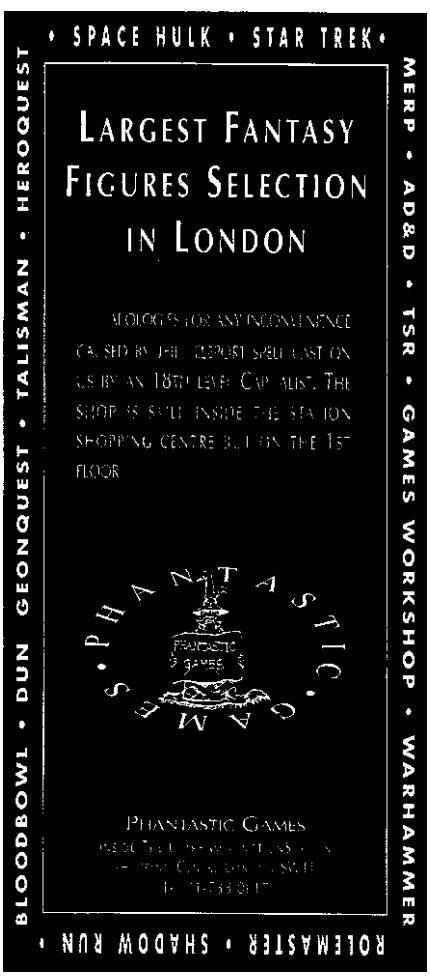
The pipes never give off a magical dweomer because in fact, the magic comes from the satyr's intuitive knowledge of music. The finely crafted reed pipes are merely a focusing agent for the magic. Many a thief has been disappointed after going through the dangers of obtaining such a set.

Sometimes a satyr, probably seeking more excitement in his life, will agree to join a group of adventurers. In general, a satyr makes for a tough opponent, so the presence of such a creature is rarely undesired in an adventuring party. His ability to survive and dwell in harmony with nature[8] makes his company a boon to those seeking to traverse a sylvan wilderness. Mind you, satyrs are rarely as reliable as a human ranger would be, or as reassuring as the presence of an elf. Satyrs have short attention spans; they are very much creatures of the moment and rarely plan ahead. Although they are suitable companions for a short stint, they can rarely stay interested in an adventure long enough to continue it for more than a week at most. They will certainly leave when it suits them, often without so much as a word of explanation.

However, the presence of a satyr will always mean one thing: a lot of fun. The satyr sings and dances on the gloomiest days, but this may well serve to irritate rather than cheer fellow adventurers. He is especially well received by those with the baser instincts of drinking and wenching in mind, for these are part of every good satyr's personality.

It would seem that satyrs have little time to spare for matters of theology, but they do have several holidays that pass as religious in some sense. The Festival of Pan generally follows the Spring Rutt in which the band leaders are determined. Pan is honored but once a year and is considered to be the patron god of wine and music. Individual groups of satyrs gather in secluded glens to hear humorous tales of Pan's many exploits, narrated by their druidic priest or by their leader if a druid is not present. Contests of music and drinking bouts follow this, the winners of which are crowned with wreaths of spring leaves. Furthermore, a great bonfire is built, into which are hurled skins of good wine and finely crafted musical instruments. This sacrifice of material goods brings an end to the ceremony.

Skerrit, the god of the centaurs, is also honored by the satyrs. They refer to Skerrit as the Hunter in the Green, and the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ceremonies dedicated to him take place each month on nights of the full moon. Satyrs band together in large clearings in isolated groves on these nights, with sometimes as many as a dozen different groups. Ritual mock hunts and fierce wrestling contests are held in the moonlight around a roaring fire. The winners that come out of these two events are called Hunters for the entire month to follow, the titles to be renewed or lost at the next gathering. Hunters are given choice food in the interim and are honored as the Chiefs personal bodyguards. Tales of the great hunting exploits of Skerrit are then related by the most prominent druidic priest present. These stories are followed by a fabulous feast of wild game hunted down earlier that day. Afterward, before dawn, the bands disperse into the trees.

As can be seen, though the satyrs are a flighty and frivolous race, they are well in touch with the land and their patron gods. Unlike many races, however, they unfortunately have no stories of creation—either of the world or themselves. Sadly, not even the satyrs themselves can give us any insight toward the secret of their origins.

Footnotes

1. Satyrs live to be over 200 years old. The age of any one satyr in a group may be determined by rolling 1d20, multiplying the result by 10, then adding 1d10 (with a 10 equalling a 0 on the last roll).

2. See DRAGON® issue #87, "The Ecology of the Dryad," and issue #109, "Hooves and Green Hair" for more on the relationship between dryads, satyrs, and humans.

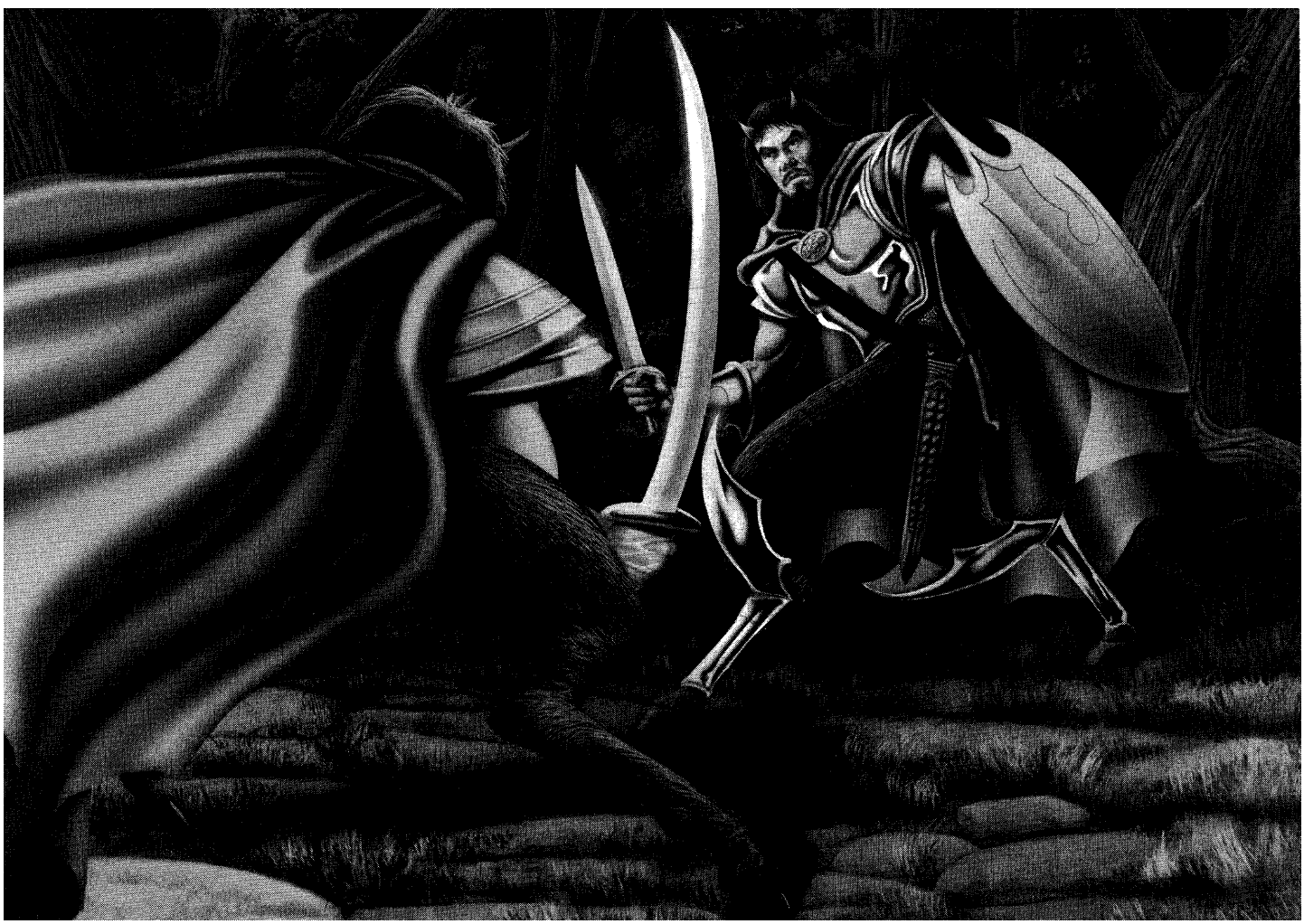
3. Young satyrs reach maturity at about the same rate as human males, staying with their dryad mothers until they are about 12 years old. Then they are left in the care of their satyr fathers, who train them in all matters important to a satyr (e.g., wenching, drinking, frolicking, music making, etc.).

4. Because of the satyr's state of mind and social values, charm spells have quite interesting effects depending on the sex of the spell-caster. If a satyr fails his saving throw against a male spell-caster, he immediately attacks the spell-caster to establish dominance and is thereby acting accordingly to the "friendship" the spell implies. If he does make his saving throw, he might attack anyway—but the spell will ensure that the attack will be immediate.

Failed saves against a female spell-caster means the satyr will be even more obnoxious in his attempt to woo her. Here the satyr will become the jealous lover, keeping all males away from his "true love." To reflect the satyr's spell-strengthened vigor, give him +2 on all attack rolls when battling "competitors." The lovesick creature will go to great lengths for his lady and will generally be as great a pain in the neck as possible.

5. Leaders (the satyrs with the most hit points of their bands) always have at least 16 strength, with a maximum of 18/50. Roll 1d6: 1-2, 16 strength; 3-4, 17 strength; 5, 18 (nonpercentile) strength; 6, 18/01-50 strength.

6. There is a 20% chance that any band will possess a "spiritual guide" among its numbers. This satyr is a special NPC shaman with either clerical or druidic powers of up to 6th level. Satyr shamans do not seem priestlike at all in behavior, as they uphold the "highest ideals" of satyrs everywhere—and one can easily guess what those "ideals" are!

7. Every satyr who tries has a 10% chance to be able to craft the magical pipes, but if there is already a magical piper present, few will feel the need to even try. Upon occasion (1%), a prospective musician crafts a set unintentionally, and he will then leave for another band.

8. All satyrs should have some tracking ability, at 20-80% accuracy. Satyrs have any of the usual bonuses or penalties associated with tracking creatures in the wilderness. Ω